



The
Camp Fire Girls
at Half Moon Lake
Margaret Vandercook



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"I AM A STRANGER IN THIS LOCALITY," HE EXPLAINED.

THE
CAMP FIRE GIRLS
AT
HALF MOON LAKE

BY
MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls" Series, "The Red
Cross Girls" Series, etc.

ILLUSTRATED

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PHILADELPHIA
THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.
PUBLISHERS

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STORIES ABOUT CAMP FIRE GIRLS

List of Titles in the Order of their Publication

- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT SUNRISE HILL
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AMID THE SNOWS
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ACROSS THE SEA
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS' CAREERS
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN AFTER YEARS
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE EDGE OF THE DESERT
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE END OF THE TRAIL
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS BEHIND THE LINES
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ON THE FIELD OF HONOR
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN GLORIOUS FRANCE
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN MERRIE ENGLAND
- THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT HALF MOON LAKE

DEC 13 1921

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The Camp Fire Girls At Half Moon Lake

CHAPTER I

INDIAN SUMMER

TWO girls were following a narrow trail.

About them the woods were scarlet and flame, golden and bronze, and in contrast the blue-green depth of tall pine and cedar trees.

Down a steep hill the trail led; on either side a thick underbrush of wild grapevines and blackberries that twisted and sprawled, showing shriveled clumps of seed pods where formerly the fruit had ripened.

One of the girls, wearing a corduroy costume of hunter's green and a tam-o-shanter of the same shade, was carrying a rifle, while over her shoulder hung a brace of rabbits and half a dozen quail.

Following close behind her the second girl's costume was of the same character, a short skirt and coat with leather leggings and high boots, but of dark blue.

"Do you think we are lost, Gill?" she inquired cheerfully.

Her companion shook her head.

"Well, as David Murray says, we are where we shouldn't be and don't know where we are, but I should never call that being lost, would you, Bettina?"

Grasping a small birch tree firmly so as not to be obliged to continue her descent, and forcing Bettina to imitate her example, Gill turned halfway around.

"To get down this hill and find our camp before dusk I suggest that we follow the fashion set by 'The Waters at Lodore'. I am not sufficiently literary to recall the exact lines of the poem, I leave that to you, Princess, but there was something about their dashing, splashing and tumbling, something quick and active, and in contrast to our methods for this past hour. Farewell, valor at present is the better part of discretion, to transpose the axiom."

As she ceased speaking, releasing the

slender young tree and bracing her feet together, Mary Gilchrist began to slide down the steep incline.

In the heart of the Adirondack forest it was now early in the month of November and about four o'clock in the afternoon. Overhead the sun was still shining and the sky a warm blue, yet from the ground arose a light mist, playing in and out amid the underbrush and the bases of the trees, ethereal and evanescent, the floating draperies of unseen fairies holding an autumn carnival.

Bettina Graham continued her downward progress more slowly and cautiously.

Over the trail beech leaves and birch leaves and the long fingers of the pine had blown in little drifts of amber and green which, mixing with the decaying wood and wet earth, formed a slippery aisle.

Ten minutes elapsed before Bettina rejoined her companion. She then discovered Mary Gilchrist seated upon an overturned log, her gun and game on the ground beside her, her hat in her lap, while she shook bits of brushwood, twigs and leaves from her hair and removed them from her apparel.

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The autumn sun shone through an arch of branches overhead on the red-brown of her hair, on her eyes so nearly the same color, on her healthy, lightly freckled skin, and her full, irregular lips.

"I am glad the turn in the trail concealed the latter part of my prowess as a mountaineer, Bettina. I certainly came down swiftly enough toward the end. In fact, I had hard work holding on to my rifle," Gill announced, shaking her head a second time so that a bronze leaf slid on to the earth. "But if I lost my dignity I did not lose my gun or game."

"You are not hurt, are you, Gill?" Bettina asked, looking with admiration and amusement at her companion.

Then as she shook her head:

"Do you know, Gill, it has been a curious fact in our Camp Fire life together, living as we have for the past few years in different places and under such a variety of conditions, to find here and there one of us discover the environment for which she must have been intended. Vera Lagerloff and Alice Ashton, for instance, were at their best when doing reconstruction work

in France. You, Gill, were very busy and useful over there, and yet no one has known the real *you* until these past few weeks in the mountains. Yet why should this be true when you lived all your past life in the western prairie country until your desire to drive a motor in France led you to join our Camp Fire and help with the relief work?"

"I sometimes feel that I have not yet found my true environment. Do you remember the wonderful new play Tante read aloud the other evening, 'Beyond the Horizon', whose theme is that each human being must live in harmony with his own nature, else he will never find happiness or success?"

Mary Gilchrist smiled.

"I remember it after a fashion, but, Bettina dear, please don't ask me to understand literary subtleties. You know there is no one in the world who cares less than I for books, although to my shame I confess it, but I don't believe I ever read or studied voluntarily save when I thought it my duty. Every interest with me is an outdoor interest and I confess I have never loved any place

so well as these Adirondack forests. Somewhere in my past I must have had an Indian ancestor, not a squaw, but a great chief who roamed these hills, hunting and fishing, sleeping and living outdoors when it was possible, because I feel at present as if I never wished to do anything else, except perhaps see my friends and family now and then. But enough of conversation, Bettina, woodsmen or woodswomen we have been told were a silent race and we must learn the law of the woods. What I really would like to know is in what direction we should travel to reach camp in the shortest length of time. We have been following a deer trail I believe that has led us nowhere. However, we cannot be many miles out of the way. We must move now toward the west, and, Bettina, let's not separate again, you know you have no sense of direction once you are more than a mile away from camp."

Unable to dispute this assertion, Bettina Graham, who was beginning to grow tired while her companion appeared as fresh as when they set out, followed obediently beside her.

A half hour longer they walked, Gill rarely hesitating, although keeping her compass in her hand and glancing at it occasionally, when suddenly both girls stopped short.

They were not alone in this portion of the woods. Not far off some one else was moving, finding the way slowly and uncertainly.

Mary Gilchrist glanced at her rifle, which she carried with skill and assurance.

"I cannot imagine who can be in the woods at so late an hour. I must try and find out."

Placing her fingers on her lips the girl uttered a shrill, clear call.

Silence.

A moment later she repeated the call.

Then both girls heard a voice shouting in a tone of mingled terror and relief.

"I have lost my path. Won't some one come and find me? I can never manage to reach you."

The girls exchanged glances.

"A lost knight in the dark forest, Bettina! Well, these are the days when women are the modern crusaders, so let us to the rescue!"

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Not many minutes after, the two girls came upon a young man of about twenty lying gracefully outstretched on the ground upon a fragrant bed of balsam, with an open book in his hands.

As Bettina and Mary drew near he arose.

"I was resting," he explained, "knowing that you would have less difficulty in discovering me if I remained quiet in one spot."

His manner was so self-possessed and self-assured that Bettina smiled, observing, however, that Gill appeared annoyed.

Small wonder! Their faces were flushed, their clothes covered with brambles from their search, while he showed no sign of discomfort. His hair, worn longer than was usual, was of a bright gold, his skin pallid and his cheeks slightly sunken, making his long, curiously shaped gray eyes more conspicuous.

"Yes, one can see you have not disturbed yourself," Gill returned. "Yet if you wish to be out of the woods before twilight, you had best make *some* effort. Fortunately I discovered the trail we were seeking while looking for you. Please follow me."

She turned sharply and moved off, her figure vanishing between the trees, every inch of her body alert, vigorous, almost boyish, with her rifle and game over her shoulder.

Nevertheless the newcomer glanced at her with an expression of disapproval, while his eyes sought Bettina for sympathy.

"I am a stranger in this locality," he explained. "I intend spending the winter at a cabin in one of the clearings. 'Long, long is the autumn dream in these corridors of heaven,'" he quoted.

"Yes, I know," Bettina answered; "still, I think it might be just as well not to discuss the beauty surrounding us for a short time and follow our guide. You cannot depend on me and I am sure you appear to be an equally unreliable woodsman. Gill," Bettina called, realizing that Gill was walking more rapidly than usual and that they might be forced to run rather than lose sight of her.

Out of breath they both were when finally they caught up. A few yards farther on, the path broadened, leading between an avenue of sugar maples raining golden leaves.

“You have been hunting,” the young man remarked in an effort to induce Mary Gilchrist to behave as if she were aware of his existence.

The fact was too obvious to require an answer, notwithstanding Gill nodded.

“Do you actually mean you have shot and killed those pretty little things yourself, those gentle, furry rabbits with their soft eyes and cotton tails and the quail one can hear calling to one another with their sweet, throaty notes? The wild animals one might be willing to destroy, although I scarcely think that fair in their own haunts. Surely a portion of this world should be reserved to them as well! But even when one reconciles oneself to the idea of a man hunting, the thought of a woman or girl being willing to kill is beyond my conception.”

Bettina saw the hot color flood Gill’s cheeks, saw her bite her lips.

“Well, you may now broaden your conceptions! I have been hunting since I was a little girl, was taught by my father a good many years ago. Do you know I have an idea, that were we to invite you

to have dinner with us to-night, no one would enjoy the game I have just killed more than you. There are so many people in this world who like to sentimentalize and leave the hard work to others, while they enjoy the results. You were quite willing to remain on your couch of balsam needles this afternoon while we scoured the woods in search of you. Your plan is an excellent one, so long as it is successful. Never do the difficult or disagreeable tasks; always find some one to do them for you."

Ordinarily gay and sweet tempered, Bettina glanced at the younger girl in surprise.

If Gill were wounded by the stranger's speech, her revenge had been swift and sure. Evidently her point had struck home, since, although he appeared angry, he made no reply.

By this time they had reached a spot so near their camp that Bettina herself recognized the environment.

A white birch tree stood alone in a small clearing, rising thirty feet in the air; on this autumn afternoon the foliage was still so dense that one could barely see the light between the thick branches.

Their path led past this tree only a few yards away.

The three of them paused.

Issuing from between the leaves came the note of an animal, or bird, wild and plaintive, yet unfamiliar.

In an instant Mary Gilchrist loaded her rifle, lifted it and fired.

The same instant Bettina gave a quick cry of warning. The next a small figure fell from the tree, limp and headlong as a wounded bird.

CHAPTER II

HALF MOON LAKE

BETTINA had the little figure stretched out with the head sloping downward and was opening her first aid kit with trembling fingers when the others reached her.

Blood was staining the little girl's Camp Fire dress and bright crimson sweater.

"Get me some water at once, I don't believe the wound is serious. You can trust me, I am studying surgery."

Bettina was gone for several moments.

On her return she saw that the little victim's eyes were open and that she was attempting to talk. The wound had proved only a flesh wound and the shot had not lodged in her arm, notwithstanding, their new acquaintance was making a careful investigation.

A few feet away Mary Gilchrist stood, never having moved, or offered a word of apology, or of fear, or remorse. The face was an odd one, animated, filled with color

and life; it was charming, yet once the color and animation departed, except for the fine eyes, the face was plain, the features were so irregular, the nose sky tipped, the lips too full, the chin revealing more character than beauty. Extremely pale, her expression at present was more sullen than sorrowful.

"Let me walk back to camp, I should like it better," the little girl insisted, when Bettina and the stranger had volunteered to carry her. Her arm was bound and hung in an improvised sling.

Not many yards further on the smoke of a camp fire could be seen in the late afternoon haze.

The small procession walked three abreast with Mary Gilchrist a few steps behind.

"We, too, plan to spend the winter in the Adirondacks, with our Camp Fire club, our guardian and a few relatives and friends," Bettina explained. "We have a beautiful camp on Half Moon Lake, but you will soon see for yourself! The arrangement is a good deal of a surprise. After a summer in England* we intended to make a trip

*See "Camp Fire Girls in Merrie England."

through Ireland, but after a few weeks found the country so unsettled we decided to sail for home. Most of us were really very glad. I was, because I had discovered this little girl in Ireland by that time. Chitty I told you was a Lancashire girl, the daughter of a miner. She lived with us in England and then ran away with her father to Ireland, so we never expected to see her again. Her name is really Elce. Chitty is a queer, Lancashire word that means a tiny, black kitten and was a title the miners gave her, as their mascot. But the name does not suit; Chitty is a black-bird and has a magical voice."

Bettina Graham smiled down at the little girl of about twelve years of age, whose uninjured arm was slipped through hers.

"We are now in sight of our camp. See, is it not lovely as I said? The Indians call this locality 'Place Where the Storm Clouds Met in Battle with the Great Serpent.' We call our camp, 'Tahawus,' which means cloud."

The young man whistled softly.

They were descending a low hill, sparsely covered with beeches, poplars and birch

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trees and a few evergreens, where but the thick growth evidently had been cleared away. The hill led down into a narrow valley, a broad stripe of shining ribbon. In the center lay a lake upon which a motor launch and several row boats were washing softly to and fro. Beyond Half Moon Lake rose an extraordinarily high mountain with files of spruce trees stationed like sentinels up and down. Over the mountain at this hour showed the first pale glimmer of a crescent moon. About an eighth of a mile from the lake stood a wide, low cabin built of logs with a generous veranda. Beside it were two smaller cabins of perhaps only two or three rooms, but connected with the large house by enclosed runways.

In front of one of the smaller houses a camp fire was burning. Wreaths of smoke were curling out of the chimney of the central cabin, as in spite of the Indian summer days, the autumn nights were cold.

Several girls in Camp Fire costumes were preparing the evening meal over the open fire, while three older women were walking slowly up and down at no great distance away.

"You will stay and have dinner with us?" Bettina said cordially. "We both are strangers to the life of the woods, yet hospitality is one of its first laws. By the way, I have not told you my name, nor have you told me yours. I am Bettina Graham, my father is Senator Graham of Washington. My friend is Mary Gilchrist. Gill, won't you speak for yourself? Do come and walk beside us."

But Mary Gilchrist made no rejoinder, nor did the newcomer urge her. To Bettina his manner if a little abstracted was perfectly courteous, but between him and Mary Gilchrist the antagonism, born of their meeting, her recent impulsive action had augmented.

"My name is Drain, Allan Drain. I beg your pardon, I did not realize I had not introduced myself. I believe I did tell you I was studying surgery. The choice is not mine, it is what my family wish for me, not what I wish for myself. I want to be a poet, a great poet. I am almost glad my health has broken down so I am forced to spend this winter alone amid the everlasting hills."

Bettina felt slightly embarrassed, but need not have concerned herself as she was not in her companion's thoughts.

Entirely self absorbed, he had thrown back his head, showing that his features were strongly marked, his nose prominent, the cheek bones high.

It struck Bettina that his star gazing at present was inward and at his own dream of his own star. He seemed a vain and not a practical person. If Gill's estimate of his character were severe, yet it might hold a germ of truth.

"Then why do you study surgery?" Bettina demanded. "Still if one is a poet, a real poet, I do not believe another profession can keep one from fulfilling his gift. One might not write so much poetry, but it might be all the more beautiful."

Her companion shook his head.

"No, you are altogether wrong; that is what too many people argue. A poet must live his own life in freedom and among his dreams. But one must eat, for even poets require food. My own people are poor, but I have an uncle who is a distinguished surgeon and, as he has no children, wants me

to follow in his footsteps, and is willing to pay for my education. Don't think I do not see the greatness of surgery, but I am entirely unfitted for the profession and the life is too difficult. I don't like an active existence; perhaps your friend was right: I may prefer to leave the hard tasks to others and only enjoy the results of their effort."

Tahawus camp was now only a few yards away. Bettina turned and moved back a few paces to join her friend.

"Gill, go to your own room at once if you prefer. I will explain how the accident occurred. Of course you had no way of guessing, but it may be painful to have to confess before so large an audience."

Mary Gilchrist shook her head.

"No, Princess, you are kind as ever, but I must do my own confessing. I feel as if I had no right to continue a member of our Camp Fire after my behavior, when all my life I have been warned against just such recklessness. Why, except for the good fortune I did not deserve, I might have—" but here Gill faltered and stopped.

She then moved on ahead and Bettina

saw her pause before the group of older women. A moment after they were listening to her story.

Half an hour later Bettina joined her in her cabin, in the meantime having introduced the young poet to Mrs. Burton, the Camp Fire guardian, to Miss Patricia Lord, and to her own mother.

She discovered Gill sitting on the edge of her bed.

"I am to talk over matters with Tante in the morning when we can be alone. Of course she was very kind. Aunt Patricia, however, told me what she likes to call the plain truth. Bettina, do you think it my duty to leave this fairyland as a punishment for my behavior? Perhaps if I remain I shall only get into a worse difficulty! Have you ever in your life met anyone you disliked so instinctively that you felt assured the influence over you could only be for evil? You may think me absurd as you like, but the young man we met by accident this afternoon immediately had that effect upon me.

"I trust I may never see him again, in fact I mean to make an effort not to see

him. I'll not come to supper, I do not wish for any. You may give him my share. One thing I do know we ought never to be brought into contact with each other, and yet now he is apt to appear at camp at any moment and I shall be responsible, since you would never have been able to discover him had you been alone!"

Suddenly Gill's chin went up and her color returned.

"You don't think I am cruel really, do you, Bettina, more so than the other girls? I only shot the game because I heard Aunt Patricia say Mrs. Burton required it and there was no chance to buy fresh provisions until the end of the week. However, I don't believe I shall ever hunt again. Perhaps in any case I had best not spend the winter at Half Moon Lake; after all, I may be happier at home! There are in my character certain faults the Sunrise Camp Fire has not yet found out. We were too busy in France to think of ourselves or of each other."

Bettina smiled.

"Why, Gill, what a depressed mood you are in! It is most unlike you. Small

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wonder you do not like our poet if already he has had this influence upon you! By the way, he is having a beautiful time at this moment with Tante and mother and I don't believe will ever trouble any of us. It strikes me that he feels entirely superior to girls and requires an older audience to appreciate him. Farewell, of course I'll bring you your supper. Chitty is not suffering in the least and things will adjust themselves in the morning when the poet shall have disappeared and been forgotten."

"There is no hope of his disappearing," Gill returned disconsolately. "One does not so readily dispose of one's evil genius."

However, she joined with Bettina's laughter at her expense.

CHAPTER III

OLD FRIENDS

“WELL, thank goodness our youthful guest has departed at last.

I was fearful that he would stay so long we could not have our hour together before bedtime. It is a magical night; do you suppose it would do you any harm, Polly, if for a little while we go outdoors? Then perhaps we shall be safe from interruption. I am afraid I am selfish enough to want you to myself now and then, dear, as I used to in the old days.”

“Nonsense, it was I who wanted you, and too often failed to secure you. You were the favorite then as you have been ever since. This evening, for instance, you so charmed the young poet that he completely ignored the girls. In fact, you flattered him as no one of the Camp Fire girls would have condescended to flatter. However, you doubtless have prepared your own punishment, for I am convinced he will expect you to read his poetry.

“Suppose we do slip out of doors for half an hour. I will put on this old fur coat as a protection against the cold, and the night is divinely clear.”

A few moments later the two women, who were among the original group of Camp Fire girls, stole quietly out of the cabin and arm in arm walked down toward the shores of Half Moon Lake.

“I wonder, Betty, how long you will be able to endure the solitude of our winter woods? I trust until after the snow falls; it has been so long since we were together in any intimate way. Yet I’m afraid you’ll soon be growing lonely and anxious for the society life you love and that loves you.”

“Nonsense, Polly! You will not be able to be rid of me so promptly. And why should I be lonely with you and my own Bettina here? Certainly I have seen but little of either of you in these past years when you have been living and working in Europe. So long as my husband remains in the West and my son at college I shall stay with you until you, or more probably Aunt Patricia, drive me away. Do you

know, Polly, actually I need to make my own daughter's acquaintance, to earn her affection and confidence as you possess it. It is true, although I do not enjoy the confession, that I do seem to understand boys better than girls and more easily make friends with them. Tony and I have always been more intimate than I have ever managed to be with Bettina. The Slim Princess, as Andrew calls her, has been her father's daughter more than mine. Polly dear, how have you managed to be so successful a Camp Fire guardian so many years? Frankly, I did not think it was in you! You were more reserved as a girl, more self-centered than the rest of us, because of course you were a genius, dear, and that means one must lead a more introspective life. Yet you have managed to be an artist and a wonderful Camp Fire guardian as well. How many different temperaments you have seen unfolded, how many girls you have helped through an infinite variety of experiences! I wonder if the other mothers are as jealous of you as I am?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Betty," Mrs. Bur-

ton answered, none too amiably, since as a matter of fact amiability was not one of her ruling traits of character. "I have simply had a good time with my Sunrise Camp Fire girls, been as much of a friend to them as I have known how to be. And they have borne with my bad health and bad tempers with amazing sweetness and understanding. In truth, you realize, Betty, that this winter in the Adirondacks is not what I had hoped and planned for this winter. With all my heart I wished to go back to my stage work! I had discovered a wonderful new play and was intending to begin rehearsals as soon as I reached New York. Then this abominable illness of mine returned while we were in Ireland. I took a severe cold over there amid the Irish mists. So between my husband and Aunt Patricia Lord and half a dozen doctors, no choice was left me. The Camp Fire girls are here in the mountains with me for my consolation more than for their pleasure, I am afraid. We will have a shut-in winter together in this fairy land. I sometimes wonder what may happen to us after a time when the snows begin and

this place is a great ice palace. But surely it is too lovely for me to complain! Look, dear, the evening star is just going down beyond the farthest hill:

“Thou fair-haired Angel of the Evening,
Now while the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love—thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
Smile on our loves; and, while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
And the lion glares through the dun forest.
The fleeces of our flock are covered with
Thy sacred dew; Protect them with thine influence.”

Then was a brief silence; the woods were still at the moment, the two friends speechless and there was only the light lapping of the waters against the shore.

“Polly O’Neill Burton, long ago I was told that Sara Bernhardt could make men and women shed tears simply by reciting the multiplication table or the alphabet. I believe you can accomplish the self-same result. I presume that you feel you have

grown stale with these years of abandoning your art, yet I sincerely believe that when you return to the stage you will be the greater artist. No human being with your temperament, Polly, can have passed through the emotional experiences of the years in Europe and not be inspired by them. I am sorry for your present disappointment, sorry you must wait another year to produce the new play, yet when the time arrives I shall be prouder of you than ever!"

"You are a dear, Betty. I hope you are a prophet as well, because sometimes I am afraid that my day as an artist is past. One so quickly is forgotten and I have been away from my audiences for so long a time. However, I don't intend to be dismal. I am not permitted to be, as a matter of fact, by Aunt Patricia. At the mildest protest on my part, she is unmerciful; I suppose that is why I do my complaining to you, Betty. Was there ever such a character as Aunt Patricia? I believe she grows fiercer in manner and kinder in heart with each passing year. Her reconstruction work in France was so

remarkable that the French government wished to present her with a medal of honor, which Aunt Patricia was about to refuse with scant courtesy when I induced her to allow me to write the letter of thanks at the time she declined the offer. There are moments when she is so autocratic I feel I must rebel and yet I am utterly devoted to her and under eternal obligations."

"So are we all, Polly, since she saved your life in France and may be saving it again with her care of you this winter. So don't behave like an unruly child. You do manage to keep absurdly young, Polly. Molly, your own twin sister, and I have confessed to each other that we feel ten years your senior. Is it because you are a genius or because you have remained the guardian of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls and been with girls so much that you continue one of them?"

"I decline to answer. Remember, Betty, it was you and not I who captured the young poet's attention this evening. I wonder if he is to be our nearest neighbor during the winter? I trust not, for I believe he would be of small service should

we get into a difficulty. We are more apt to be forced to look after him. By the way, Betty, I am glad the William Blake poem did not invoke a shiver in you. It struck me that the suggestion of the wolf raging wide through the dun forest was unpleasantly suggestive, although we are assured that the wolf has vanished from the Adirondack Mountains as surely as the Indian braves and that only their ghosts haunt their beloved woods."

Again for a few moments there was a renewed silence, the two friends of many years with their arms entwined about each other continuing to walk up and down contemplating the exquisite landscape under the approaching shadow of the night.

Nearly of the same height, Polly O'Neill Burton, who in social life was Mrs. Richard Burton, was far slenderer than her companion, giving her an effect of greater youth.

Betty Graham, who had been Betty Ashton in former days, had grown from a pretty girl into a rarely beautiful and charming woman, distinguished for her grace of manner and social gifts. She

was more beautiful than her friend. Even as a girl Polly O'Neill had never been beautiful in any conventional fashion. Her face was long, her features slightly irregular, with a broad, low brow and delicate, pointed chin. She had a wealth of dusky black hair and amazing blue eyes of swiftly changing color and expression and a wide, mobile mouth.

Once long ago Betty Ashton had said: "One never is aware of the fact that Polly possesses any other features than her eyes and mouth. Her eyes always hold your attention until she begins to speak and then the movement of her lips, the haunting quality of her voice absorb one."

To-night the figure which moved beside her seemed to be thinner and frailer than at any time since her marriage.

Trying Miss Patricia might be upon occasions, yet at present Betty Graham could only rejoice at the thought of her constant vigilance. Equally devoted she and the Camp Fire girls might be, yet they possessed neither the wisdom nor the authority of Miss Patricia. She remembered that although pliable in small matters,

in any question of her art Polly O'Neill had been singularly obstinate. Had she not in her girlhood disappeared from her family and friends and in defiance of their wish devoted herself to her career?

At present would she remain shut up in the winter woods with the new play waiting to be produced and New York City only a few hours away?

“Why don’t you study your new part, Polly, while you are growing stronger? Would it not help to keep you amused?”

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

“No, only make the waiting more trying. I have promised my husband and Aunt Patricia to devote this winter to my health. I shall keep my word, but beyond this winter I have made no promise. Betty, did you hear a strange sound? I am very nervous to-night and seem often to hear voices in the wind and murmurings as if all the fairy folk were whispering together. No, I am not mad; remember, Betty, how nearly I came to being born in Ireland, where not to believe in fairies is to forswear one’s birthplace. Besides, I often try to reproduce the sounds I hear

in nature. It is a great training for one's voice. And this aids one in acting. Suppose we go back now to the cabin. I want to see that my Camp Fire girls are ready for bed. A narrow escape from a tragedy this afternoon and yet Mary Gilchrist, Gill I prefer calling her, is usually the most sensible one of us. One's guardian angel seems to take a holiday now and then, and yet Gill's saved her in the end. Good gracious, here comes Aunt Patricia! I vainly hoped she would not discover that we were out of doors."

Through the darkness a tall, severe figure could be seen moving with long, masculine strides.

"Polly O'Neill, is this the fashion in which you endeavor to regain your health? I presume you go out into the night air because you know it is so particularly bad for you and in order to give additional trouble to the people who are compelled to care for you?"

"It is a warm, clear night, Aunt Patricia. Besides, no one, as you say, is compelled to care for me. When I am so ill as to be especially troublesome I can send for a nurse. Betty and I were just going indoors."

"Humph!" Miss Patricia grunted in a tone of doubt.

Mrs. Graham laughed, slipping her arm affectionately through that of Miss Patricia.

"We really were coming indoors. But look here, Aunt Patricia, if Polly and the Camp Fire girls object to being treated as if they were young and in need of advice and sometimes of discipline, while I am with you, suppose you devote yourself to me. It would be delightful to be treated as if I were a girl again, instead of the mother of a grown-up son and daughter."

"You have a lovable nature, Betty Graham, which I think your daughter, Bettina, has in a measure inherited. Polly O'Neill Burton, I regret being forced to speak of it, is a spoiled and ungrateful woman."

Mrs. Burton, who had been walking a few feet apart from her companions, now flushed and laughed. Catching up, she slipped her hand through Miss Patricia's free arm, resting her head for an instant against the angular shoulder.

"I may be the one, but you know I am not the other, Miss Patricia Lord! Besides,

I am as ashamed of you as I am of myself for being in such a bad temper.

"Look at our cabin how beautiful it is! Let us ask Tahawus, the great cloud, to keep us under his shelter for the night. I hope the Camp Fire girls are safe in bed. Sometimes, Betty, I could wish that none of them need ever grow older."

"A wish in which they would scarcely concur, Polly. One wants the life adventure whatever it may be. Besides, our Camp Fire builds for the future as well as for the present."

Having reached the veranda, Bettina Graham, hearing the voices outside, came to open the front door; wearing a heavy blue flannel wrapper over her blue pajamas, her bare feet were thrust into blue slippers and around her small head her hair was closely bound in yellow braids.

"I have been waiting to say good-night. Of course I realized that any truants would be you and Tante, mother."

"Bettina," her mother replied irrelevantly, "you should have been called Diana; your own name has never suited you in the least and it was absurd that

you should have been named for me when you are so unlike me. Since I have been watching you here in these woods——”

Bettina and Mrs. Burton laughed and even Aunt Patricia smiled grimly.

“Is it my present costume which recalls the famous huntress, mother, or is it that the woods are making you romantic? Please remember that I do not enjoy being reminded that I am wholly unlike my beautiful mother. I too have wished for auburn hair—wine colored our young poet called it to-night, did he not?—and eyes like——”

“Go to bed, Bettina. There is nothing of the goddess about you in manner or behavior at this moment.”

Mrs. Graham’s tone was half amused and half annoyed.

“Nevertheless, you will receive the poems in the morning. Gill and I really rescued the poet and deserve the attention,” Bettina answered, as she ran away to bed, tall and slim, with a peculiar grace of movement which ever had been characteristic of her.

CHAPTER IV

THE HERMIT

IN the return of the Camp Fire girls to their own country there was one of the girls who was unreservedly glad. Not one word of regret, not an instant of repining for foreign lands, or scenes or friends, and this girl was Sally Ashton, notwithstanding the fact that Sally actually had been through more entertaining experiences than the other girls. However, these experiences had made but slight spiritual impression upon her, for Sally was a matter-of-fact and not an emotional person. She had nursed Lieutenant Fleury under curious circumstances in the story called "The Camp Fire Girls on the Field of Honor", but neither then nor afterwards had the young French lieutenant's gratitude and affection for her wakened more than a friendly response. The same result followed her acquaintance with the young Englishman in "The Camp Fire Girls

in Merrie England." Calmly Sally had announced in both instances that her own affection was indissolubly bound up with her own country and that her one desire was to return to the United States and to spend the rest of her life there.

At present living with the Camp Fire girls in their cabin in the Adirondacks, Sally had become her placid and contented self. The war was over and she need not reflect upon the past, since it was of no avail to make herself unhappy with old memories.

Moreover, although not particularly fond of the mountains, Sally preferred living in the country to the town and was now particularly pleased with their household arrangements.

The camp in which they were planning to spend the winter was a more expensive mode of living than the Camp Fire girls appreciated and was possible only because of Miss Patricia Lord. Upon Captain and Mrs. Burton's small estate, the last few years in Europe had made serious inroads. Indeed, one of the reasons for Mrs. Burton's desire to return to her stage career

was in order to increase their fortune. Her husband, Captain Richard Burton, was a number of years her senior and although an actor at the time of their marriage had no desire to continue his former profession. In the past years of Red Cross work he had lost interest and was out of touch with his old life and at present was continuing his Red Cross work, holding a position at a small salary in Washington.

None of these details of other lives disturbed Sally Ashton. She was merely aware that their new camp was beautiful and comfortable and that she had the right to look forward to a long and peaceful winter. She and her sister, Alice, had spent a few months with their mother and father near Boston in the interval of their return from England and their arrival in the Adirondacks and were expecting their mother and father as guests at Christmas. Indeed, there were plans for a Christmas house party which would tax the capacity of the big cabin.

Ordinarily the Camp Fire work was divided so that the girls were allowed to

devote their energies to the tasks they preferred, and as Sally was more domestic in her tastes than any member of the Sunrise Camp Fire group, she was frequently allowed first choice.

At present she had elected to have charge of the big living-room of the cabin and at this moment was engaged in putting it in order.

She looked extremely young and pretty in her big blue apron which she wore over a brown serge frock, the girls having concluded to lay aside their khaki costumes, except on ceremonial occasions, because of the cold. Her brown hair, parted a little at one side, was brushed smoothly down across her forehead and into a large soft coil at the back of her head. Over it she wore a net, but little tendrils of curling brown hair showed on her temples and throat. Sally's skin, ordinarily of a clear, warm pallor, was at present at its loveliest because she was especially happy and well. To Sally happiness meant peace and contentment rather than intensity of emotion or the constant movement of events.

She leaned down now to thrust some

white birch sticks under the great log that smouldered at the back of the mammoth fireplace. Behind the cabin the winter fire logs were piled so high as to suggest an old time pioneer fortification prepared against an attack by the Indians.

Then when Sally arose she glanced about the big room.

The floors were covered with thick, brightly colored rugs for warmth and cheerfulness. Until the advent of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls, the room had been conspicuously a man's room. As a matter of fact, Tahawus cabin had been erected to serve as a clubhouse for a group of wealthy men who wished to enjoy the winter sports. But losing interest, Miss Patricia Lord had been able to rent it for the year.

In the center of the room stood a long, heavy oak table sufficiently large for any number of books, magazines and newspapers. The chairs were upholstered in brown leather, while upon the stained walls were several fine paintings of scenes in the Adirondacks. The sofa was long enough for two of the Camp Fire girls to find repose at the same time. Above the mantel was a magnificent elk's head.

As a man's club room, the room may have been appropriate, but for their purpose the Camp Fire girls and their guardian found it unsympathetic. The changes they had made were not important, and yet its entire character had altered.

On the mantel were the Camp Fire candlesticks holding the three Camp Fire candles and Indian baskets and jars filled with autumn leaves, bright red berries and branches of bayberry.

To-day on the center table was a big bowl of golden roses sent to Mrs. Burton by an admirer of her work who but recently had learned of her return to the United States. There was a basket of brightly colored wool, the property of Mrs. Graham, who rashly had promised to knit each member of the Camp Fire a new sweater before the winter was over.

On a smaller table was Sally's own basket of silk. Notwithstanding the amusement of the other girls, she had begun to piece together an old-fashioned octagonal quilt, following a pattern of half a century before.

Indeed, there were many feminine evidences about the room, some of them too subtle to be recognized immediately.

Satisfied with her scrutiny, Sally seated herself in a large chair before the fire.

Breakfast had been over for an hour or more and the big cabin was almost empty. Miss Patricia Lord was outdoors giving orders to the man who came in the mornings and afternoons to look after the furnace and do whatever work it was impossible for the girls to accomplish. Mrs. Burton was in her own room writing letters or resting. Mrs. Graham, Bettina and Marguerite Arnot had driven over to Saranac, several miles away, to do some important shopping. The other girls were studying in one of the smaller cabins. It was one of the rules for the winter that each member of the Sunrise Camp Fire club should devote three hours a day to some kind of fairly serious study save on holidays.

Sally personally felt that she should follow their righteous example and yet at the present moment could scarcely make up her mind to be so virtuous.

Slipping a box from her pocket, she placed a chocolate between her small white teeth. The box had come through the mail the other day with a note from Dan

Webster, her old childhood friend. In Paris he had suggested that she should come home before her other friends. He now expressed himself as pleased at her return. The letter struck Sally as not so enthusiastic as she had the right to expect. Dan Webster always had been her especial friend since they were children. However, he was busy, having recently taken full charge of his father's farm in New Hampshire, so Sally presumed he was too absorbed to give much thought to her.

Hearing a sound outside in the hall, she got up and went to the open door. The hall was nearly half the size of the living-room with a second large fireplace. Mary Gilchrist had just come in from the outdoors.

"Why, Gill, I thought you were out for an early morning walk! I heard Bettina say we were not to expect you at breakfast as you had made yourself a cup of coffee and some toast and would not return until we had finished. How white you look! Are you worrying over what almost happened yesterday? Gill, it bores me so to have people worry over the tragedies or the misfortunes that do not occur. Alice

says that is because I have a practical and unemotional nature. Perhaps that is true, I do not know; it only seems to me a waste of time and energy. Elce was not hurt yesterday, not seriously. She slept perfectly and says her arm is not painful. Yet you look as if you were seriously ill."

Mary Gilchrist, who was sometimes called Gill and sometimes Mary by the other Camp Fire girls, smiled at Sally's matter-of-fact manner.

"You are a comfortable person, Sally, and usually I agree with what you have just said and try to follow your illustrious example. Only at present I feel as if I ought to do some kind of penance for my fault. I came to have a quiet talk with Mrs. Burton, and to ask her if she feels I have forfeited my right to be a member of her Camp Fire group."

Smiling, Sally shook her head.

"Oh, you need not trouble over any criticism from Tante! Only on the most unexpected occasions is she ever stern and I am sure she will appreciate that you were sufficiently frightened not to be so reckless a second time. By the way, I

must tell you something amusing in order to cheer you.

“Early this morning as I was coming to breakfast I heard some one at the front door. Opening it I discovered the youth you and Bettina rescued yesterday. He was wearing a bright scarlet tam-o-shanter and a velvet coat and had a crimson scarf about his neck, and really looked rather handsome. I met him at dinner yesterday evening, but he was not in the least concerned in speaking to me and made no pretence of recognizing me. At once he demanded Mrs. Graham. When Aunt Betty came out into the hall he thrust a leather case into her hands and asked her to read his collection of unpublished poems.

“Aunt Betty was of course very sweet and gracious about it, but I heard her moaning over the fact afterwards that actually there are fifty poems. Bettina counted. She and Tante were laughing over the fact after breakfast, since Aunt Betty insists she detests poetry and has scarcely read a line of it in years. However, the poet appeared to think she would be delighted with the opportunity!”

Mary Gilchrist frowned.

"Oh, I wish the poet and his poetry might vanish together. In fact, if I knew where Mrs. Graham had placed the masterpieces I should like to light a blaze with them. It is absurd of me, Sally, but I took a dislike to the youth and afterwards my own behavior made me dislike him the more, as though he were partly responsible. But do go for a walk, Sally, you love the indoors as much as I do the open country. It is a wonderful morning and will do you lots of good."

Half an hour later, slightly against her will, as she preferred the open fire and her sewing, Sally Ashton and the little Lancashire girl started for a walk together. Mrs. Burton had sent word that Chitty was in need of amusement and Sally had volunteered her services.

Now like children they danced through the pine woods behind the camp, sometimes walking sedately, at others running a few steps, frightening the squirrels and chipmunks, who came out and seated themselves on the upper branches of the trees to chatter and scold.

"You do not appear in the least uncomfortable from your injury yesterday," Sally remarked, after protesting that they walk more quietly. "Nevertheless, suppose we sit down and rest for a few moments. I am not a gypsy, although I remember you once said that you would like to be one."

The younger girl, who was a daughter of an English miner, sat down on a bed of pine needles facing Sally, who preferred the trunk of a riven tree.

"Yes, I used to talk of wishing to be a gypsy, but that was before I went to Ireland with my father and we attempted to live like gypsies. Then we used to go about through the villages, where I had to sing in the streets for pennies in the wind and rain and cold. Sometimes we slept indoors but more often in stables and lofts, until I was often too weary to sing. Then my father grew tired of the wandering life and wished to return to the army. Now I think what I wished was to live in a forest like this and always to be happy and free."

Sally's brown eyes were slightly puzzled. The little girl's nature was an enigma to her, as it was to most persons. Freedom seemed

Chitty's one dream, and yet she could scarcely have known what the great word signified even for her own small, individual life.

"Suppose you sing for me if you feel well enough, Chitty. I have not heard you for a long time, you only sing when you are out of doors unless some one urges you. I am sleepy, so you can feel as if you were almost entirely alone."

Sally lifted up her head to watch a gleam of golden sunlight slant through the exquisite cool darkness of the pine branches and to see the long, delicate fingers of the pines tremble in the light winds.

Then suddenly her eyes dropped toward her lap.

If she were not musical, if she were not emotional, if she cared little for the outdoors and more for the sheltered places and life's serenities, yet the little Lancashire girl's gift set even her pulses stirring.

Scarcely a proper definition to call the variety of sounds which Chitty poured forth with the ease and unconsciousness of a mocking-bird, singing. There were trills, gay and high and poignant, then a low note like a sob, then light ripples like wind blow-

ing over the water, then bold, straightforward whistles, or the plaintive notes of a wood dove.

Never had the effect been more magical to Sally's ears.

Then suddenly, without being aware of any particular reason, she turned her eyes and glanced in another direction.

Seated not many yards away and directly facing her was one of the strangest figures she had ever seen. The man was so nearly the color of the bark of the tree that he might have been carved out of wood. His hair and skin were a coppery brown, he had a short beard of the same shade and eyes that were only slightly more brown. He did not look very old, although his clothes were old and shabby. He wore a leather coat and knee breeches and was without a hat. Listening with absolute intensity to Chitty's music, he seemed scarcely aware of their existence.

When she ceased, he got up and Sally saw that he apparently wished to speak to them, and yet could not make up his mind to alarm them.

As a matter of fact, Sally was not in the least frightened.

CHAPTER V

A CONVERSATION AND A LOSS

“**I**HAVE not spoken to any human being in more than a month,” the stranger said in dull, even tones as if he were deaf.

“Why?” Sally Ashton inquired in her usual matter-of-fact fashion. “There are many people who come to the Adirondack forests and there are towns and villages and cities not many miles away. You must choose not to speak to anyone. Are you a hermit?”

The man answered slowly:

“I call myself a hunter and a woodsman. My cabin is a good many miles from any road and in the summer when the mountains are filled with tourists I remain near my own place. But now that the winter is approaching and the woods beginning to be deserted save by those of us who live here I roam about in search of food and change of scene.”

"Have you always lived here?" Sally demanded with her accustomed bluntness. "Otherwise you must be in hiding because of some trouble or secret you wish to conceal."

For a moment the man stared in silence, either angry or amazed.

"I have not lived here always," he replied evasively, "but there are men in these woods who have been here since boyhood. One day you may meet a backwoodsman who is a great preacher here in God's tabernacle of the outdoors. You have not told me why I find you in the forest when the autumn days are passing?"

Sally shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I am afraid you will not find this portion of your woods deserted for many months. With a number of other girls and some older friends we intend spending the winter in these hills. But good-day."

Stretching forth her hand, Sally took hold of the younger girl's, intending to walk back to their own cabin. If their new acquaintance did not alarm her, there was something in his manner which rendered her uncomfortable.



FOR A MOMENT THE MAN STARED IN SILENCE

He was not glancing toward her at the present instant, but toward the little English girl.

"Who taught you to sing in that fashion?" he inquired. "But there, that was a stupid question! No one could have taught a child like you. You have a great gift and for a little while were able to make me forget what I have not forgotten in many years. Some day I may again be your uninvited audience. Good-by."

Then the two girls stood watching the figure disappear into a denser portion of the woods, and Sally said with a little frown:

"Odd! At first I was under the impression that our new acquaintance was a back-woodsman, I mean a man without an education except a knowledge of the outdoors, but now I am uncertain. In fact, I am sure he was once a different character of person and came to the forest to escape some sorrow or wrong doing. However, as I hate mysteries I trust we shall not meet him again; probably we never shall."

Since the encounter had really been of no importance and there were many other things on her mind, an hour later Sally had

forgotten the occurrence. In truth, at the time it did not appear to her or to Chitty as of sufficient interest to mention to any member of the Camp Fire.

During the afternoon for several hours Sally remained in the study in the smaller cabin working at her French and writing a letter in French to a member of the first Camp Fire club established in the city of Paris. Then, at a quarter before four, she disappeared to her own room, where she made a quick toilet and came down to the big living-room in the main cabin.

From four to five o'clock was the pleasantest hour of the day. The habit of afternoon tea so firmly established during the summer in "Merrie England" was now continued under different conditions in the heart of the North woods.

Nearly all the members of the Sunrise Camp Fire who were together for the winter season, Sally found seated in a wide circle before the open fire.

Standing beside the tea wagon, which she had just rolled into the room, was her own sister, Alice Ashton, who had remained in France with Miss Patricia Lord and Vera

Lagerloff to continue the reconstruction work after the other Camp Fire girls had crossed to England with their Camp Fire guardian.

Alice Ashton was a tall, serious girl with reddish hair and blue eyes, entirely unlike Sally in appearance and disposition.

Kneeling before the fire at this moment and toasting thin slices of bread to a beautiful brownness was Vera Lagerloff, who was an American girl notwithstanding her foreign name. This was due to the fact that her parents were Russians. Vera was born in the United States and was an American enthusiast.

Not far away seated in a low chair, a pile of lavender silk in her lap, was Marguerite Arnot, her dark head bent over her work. Older than the other Camp Fire girls by a year or more, Marguerite Arnot was actually a French girl who had been received as a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire under exceptional conditions. Brought into their household in "Glorious France" as Miss Patricia Lord's protégée, later she had become one of their number. Her presence in the United States was due to the fact

that she had yielded to Mrs. Burton's and to Bettina Graham's persuasion and had decided to make her home in America and to go on with her work. Of gentle breeding and education, Marguerite Arnot and her mother were dressmakers in Paris, until her mother's death during the war had left the girl ill and alone. Not long after she had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Miss Patricia Lord.

At present Miss Patricia Lord was seated behind the rest of the group, reading a lengthy report she recently had received from France, concerning a home for war orphans that she was building in the neighborhood of one of the great French battle-fields. Every now and then, however, her glance wandered from the paper in her hand to the figure of a younger woman, half seated and half reclining in a great chair near the tea table.

Mrs. Burton, the Camp Fire guardian, whose figure was more slender than a young girl's, was wearing a heavy, red-corded silk tea gown; the firelight playing on her dusky hair, on her white face with the long delicate chin and high cheek bones.

Seated on a stool beside her, with her head resting in the palms of her hands, was the youngest member of the household, the small daughter of an English miner. Chitty's hair was even blacker than Mrs. Burton's, her skin darker and more sallow, and her eyes large, black and wistful. A peculiarity of the little girl was that she rarely ever talked unless a question were addressed to her directly, expressing herself chiefly through her music.

At a table with her back to the others, Mary Gilchrist, who recently had requested the Camp Fire girls to use her father's name for her, Gill, rather than Mary, apparently was deeply engaged with a history of the North woods which she seemed to be reading. Ordinarily one of the gayest and most animated of the group of Camp Fire girls, since her reckless action the day before she had been uncommonly silent and subdued.

Bettina Graham and her mother had not yet entered the room and tea had not been served.

“Is that you, Sally dear? I have scarcely seen you all day. Tell me what you are thinking of while you stand there studying our Camp Fire circle.”

The other girls, attracted by Mrs. Burton's speech, looked over toward Sally, who often was unexpectedly amusing.

Coming further into the room, Sally stood close beside the Camp Fire guardian's chair.

"Do you want really to hear what I was thinking, Tante? I was considering the fact that our Sunrise Camp Fire at present was smaller in number than I ever have known it to be and that I am sorry. Yvonne Fleury has returned to live with her brother at the Château Yvonne, Gerry is married and she and Felix in California, and now Peggy is no longer with us. Naturally, as she is planning to marry after Christmas, she wishes to be with her mother and father. Well, thank goodness we shall have her for a visit at Christmas time!"

Sally's reply was so unexpected that there was a short silence in the big room, broken only by the crackling of the wood fire.

The loss of Peggy Webster as a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire group was perhaps more keenly felt than that of any other girl.

The daughter of Mrs. Burton's twin sister, Mollie O'Neill, who afterwards became Mrs. Daniel Webster, Peggy had been particularly devoted to her aunt and, as Mrs. Burton had no children of her own, was more like her own daughter. Moreover, Peggy and Bettina Graham, Sally and Alice Ashton had been intimate friends since they were tiny children, long before they had any acquaintance with the later members of their Camp Fire group. Peggy possessed a singularly vital personality and was generous, ardent and sweet.

"Sally, if you love me do not speak of Peggy's absence or of her approaching marriage. She is too absurdly young! And yet I presume I must have given my consent as Peggy declared she would not marry without it, although she and Ralph Merritt already feel they have waited a long time. Sally, I feel as you do that our Camp Fire circle is becoming too small. Perhaps we shall grow too centered in one another and not so helpful as we wish to be. What would you suggest as a remedy?"

There was no immediate reply, the other girls as well as Sally Ashton pondering the question.

"Why, I presume we ought to invite other girls to join our Sunrise club," Sally answered a moment later. And although her reply was neither original nor startling, it was received with unsympathetic silence.

"You have the most unfortunate fashion, Sally, of saying things other people would prefer *not* to hear," Alice Ashton remarked with sisterly severeness. Then, before any one else had an opportunity to speak, the living-room door opened and Mrs. Graham and Bettina entered.

"Glad you have arrived at last, Betty, we have been waiting tea for you and Bettina. I was just about to send one of the girls to find out what had become of you. Vera has made a wonderful lot of toast and we don't wish it to grow cold."

"Sorry to have delayed you," Mrs. Graham replied, "but the most extraordinary thing has occurred. I am glad to find all of you gathered together here at the same time. This morning the young fellow, Allen Drain, who had dinner with us, brought me a collection of his unpublished poems which he wished to have me read. They were in a black leather port-

folio about a foot square. When I drove to Saranac this morning I left the portfolio on a small table in Bettina's and my bedroom. Since my return Bettina and I have searched for more than an hour and can find no sign of it. Did you, Polly, or any of the girls take possession of it? I cannot believe Aunt Patricia would be interested. Some one of course must have moved it. I don't mean to be cross, but I think I should have been told. Bettina and I have had an uncomfortable hour of searching. Yet, whoever loved the poems better than I shall be forgiven as soon as they are restored to me."

There was no immediate reply, Mrs. Burton, Aunt Patricia and the girls glancing at one another, each expecting the other to plead guilty.

"Well, confess, please, won't some one? I am sure the poet would be flattered if he learned what has occurred," Mrs. Burton added. "I am sorry, Betty. You should have come at once and asked, rather than tired yourself by searching."

"Never a sign of the poet's manuscript have I beheld!" Alice Ashton returned.

“I am guiltless, Mrs. Graham, but why did you not let me know so that I might have helped you look?” Marguerite Arnot answered.

One by one each separate member of the little circle announced an utter lack of information with regard to the lost portfolio, save Mary Gilchrist, who had gone on with her reading after Bettina and her mother’s entrance into the living-room.

“Mary, I wonder if by any chance you noticed the manuscript of the poems in Mrs. Graham’s room when I asked you to find a magazine for me this morning?” Mrs. Burton inquired.

Mary Gilchrist glanced up from the pages of her book, flushing slightly.

“No, I don’t recall seeing the manuscript, but really I cannot appreciate why Mrs. Graham should be so concerned. I have an idea the poems were of no value; probably some one thought they were waste paper and they were thrown into the fire.”

“But, Gill, I don’t believe you understand the situation,” Bettina Graham remonstrated. “Whether or not the poems were of value they must represent years of work and

thought to Mr. Drain. I have no doubt they mean more to him than we can well imagine. Besides, the poems were entrusted to mother's keeping and it would be simply too dreadful if they could not be found!"

Shrugging her shoulders slightly, Mary Gilchrist resumed her reading, while Mrs. Graham sat down beside the Camp Fire guardian.

"Don't trouble, Betty dear, I am distressed that you have been uneasy, but let's have tea and then begin a more thorough search of the entire house. The manuscript of course is only tucked away somewhere out of sight and will soon be found. Poor young poet, nothing so tragic could have happened as that his verse should be lost!"

"You don't suppose, Polly, that by any unlucky chance, if the portfolio is not discovered the boy has no copies of his verses? I scarcely dare face him unless the original manuscript which he gave to me this morning with such pride and pleasure, is restored. I cannot even face the idea that the effort of the boy's lifetime may be destroyed."

“Nonsense, mother, drink your tea and afterwards we will return to the search! Nothing else has disappeared save the manuscript, which would scarcely attract an ordinary thief.”

“Perhaps the poet himself returned mysteriously and bore off his own handiwork, unable to be so long without it,” Mary Gilchrist suggested. No one made a reply.

CHAPTER VI

“A MAN FOR A’ THAT.”

SEVERAL days later Mary Gilchrist was again in the living-room in the early afternoon, but on this occasion she was alone.

At the piano in the corner of the room she was practising a number of new Camp Fire songs. During their shut-in winter in the mountains, music promised to be one of the principal relaxations, and, although not so good a pianist as Bettina Graham, Gill felt it her duty to regain a little of her lost skill, due to the failure to work at her music during the years spent abroad.

At present she was attempting a more ambitious effort, trying to capture and repeat the odd, musical notes that poured forth so spontaneously from the youngest of the Camp Fire girls. Meeting with scant success, she was so intent upon her effort that she was not aroused until the living room door opened and an unexpected guest entered.

As he did not glance in her direction, at the same instant Mary Gilchrist slipped from the piano stool and at once concealed herself behind a tall fire screen that had been placed near the wall. Her action was involuntary, since she scarcely had time for thought; nevertheless, once in her place of hiding, deliberately Gill made up her mind to remain where she was until she might escape without detection.

The visitor who had come into the living-room was Allan Drain.

They had not seen each other since their original meeting and Gill wished for no other. Not liking her present position, yet it appeared impossible to make her escape without being discovered and so obliged to speak with him alone.

Between a tiny opening in the screen she could behold a tall figure moving up and down before the fire, and afterwards quietly gazing into its depths. He looked older than she recalled and yet Gill felt that she disliked his appearance. The thin figure seemed theatrical and self-conscious and in a way effeminate, but then the type of youth she admired had great physical

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strength and courage, and Gill was convinced that the present unconscious actor was possessed of neither.

She was aroused from her reflections by a second opening of the door and the appearance of Mrs. Graham in the same room.

Dressed in a simple, dark blue serge, nevertheless she gave an effect of social elegance and grace. A remarkably pretty girl as Betty Ashton, as Mrs. Anthony Graham, the wife of a distinguished United States senator, her beauty and poise had increased with added years and opportunities.

Her abundant auburn hair had the lovely sheen which comes from careful attention, there were a few lines about her eyes, but except for these her skin was firm and clear with a bright rose color in her cheeks, her nose short and straight, her lips full and deeply curved.

Not able to catch her expression as she moved swiftly across the room and held out her hand to their guest, Gill was able to hear her first words and to wish that she had faced the situation in the beginning rather than place herself in her present posi-

tion. No one in their household would be more vexed than Mrs. Graham to discover her in hiding.

Brought up by her father on their large wheat farm in the middle west, Mary Gilchrist had lived an outdoor life, and without a mother had been taught few of the social amenities. During the years abroad, her strength and endurance, her skill as a motorist, her somewhat boyish abilities had proved so useful that it had not occurred to Mary Gilchrist until her return to the United States that she was without the social knowledge and education that girls of her age and position should possess. Before her visit home, during the few weeks in New York City, she had been conscious of her own awkwardness, particularly appreciating the difference between her own manners and Bettina Graham's. For this reason, as well as others, she was pleased over the Camp Fire's choice of the Adirondack forest for their winter home. In a wide, free, outdoor atmosphere she would be once more at ease and undisturbed by her want of social knowledge.

Then, unexpectedly, Bettina's mother,

Mrs. Graham, had chosen to spend the winter with them and from the first moment of their introduction Gill had been able to understand why Bettina Graham had acquired a poise and graciousness no one of the other Sunrise Camp Fire girls possessed.

Moreover, what Bettina had in slight measure her mother possessed in fuller degree. Indeed, not alone to Mary Gilchrist's untrained judgment, but among persons with the widest social acquaintance, Betty Graham was famous for her charm of manner and her gift for attracting men and women.

"I wrote to ask you to come to see me to-day for a special reason, Mr. Drain. But because I am sorrier than I can say I am going to explain to you at once and have the ordeal past. I shall not ask you to forgive me, only to appreciate my regret. Suppose we both sit down."

Instinctively disliking Allan Drain, yet Mary Gilchrist realized that he also had a gracious and cultivated manner when he chose to employ it, as he did with Mrs. Graham. From her vantage point, Gill watched him draw a chair closer to the fire

and wait until Mrs. Graham was seated, before seating himself near her.

“I cannot imagine why you should be asking my pardon for a mistake or a fault, but of course you know that I freely forgive you. The apology should come from me. I appreciated later that I ought not to have thrust my poor verses upon you to bore you and absorb your time when I knew you so slightly. The truth is I am lonely this winter and my scribbling means more to me than it warrants. My family are not in sympathy with my versifying or any of my views of life. There are no women among us, there is only my father, two older brothers and myself. They have worked very hard and are not prosperous and feel I ought to be grateful to my uncle for offering me the education they were not able to have.”

“Then it is all the more difficult for me to tell you, Mr. Drain, that the manuscripts of your poems which you entrusted to me have by some extraordinary chance vanished. I did not wish to tell you of this and so for days I have made inquiries and every member of our household has searched for

the verses. Now I cannot conceive of what actually has become of them, and yet I am afraid I am beginning to lose hope of their being discovered. It is all the more mysterious because we have no maids, no one who could have thrown the papers away from sheer carelessness and then be unwilling to confess. Nevertheless, I do feel so guilty and responsible, for if I had locked the manuscript away instead of placing it on a small table in my bed-room along with some books and papers, this probably would not have occurred."

Mrs. Graham leaned over and laid her hand lightly upon her companion's.

"Do reproach me, please do not look so white and wretched. I know the loss of your verses means many days of your time. But if you will give me the privilege, in order to show you have in a measure forgiven me, I shall send for some one to come to you and do the typewriting for you a second time, or if you will permit Bettina to copy the poems, I am sure she will do her best."

"But, Mrs. Graham, I have no other copies of my poems, except three or four

which I have had the good luck to have published in second-class magazines. Two days before I brought my manuscript to you I got them all into shape and burned up and threw away the odd bits of paper upon which they had been written. The afternoon I met your daughter and her friends in the woods I had gone for a walk to celebrate the fact that my task was accomplished. As I was thinking more of my verses than the landmarks, I lost my way. But please, please don’t be so unhappy on my account. The fault was mine, not yours. I should not have troubled you. You’ll allow me to say good-by and come to see you another day. No use pretending, Mrs. Graham, that I am not a good deal cut up and that I don’t feel that fate has been pretty hard. You are sure that you have looked everywhere and that the manuscript has not merely been misplaced.”

“I’m afraid not. But really I don’t feel that I can accept the idea that your verses are lost forever. Surely you must recall some of them, or will find stray copies here and there!” There were tears in Mrs. Graham’s voice as well as in her eyes.

“Don’t stay any longer than you wish, if it only makes things harder for you. One would rather, I know, face disappointment alone. And don’t try to fight your resentment, I shall feel better the angrier you are with me.”

Allan Drain and Mrs. Graham arose at the same time, and Mary Gilchrist, scarcely realizing what she was doing, half followed their example, so that she was enabled to see the two figures over the top of her screen.

Mrs. Graham’s back was turned to her, but she could catch a glimpse of her companion’s face. He was painfully white, yet his lips were firmly closed and his expression showed less of the self pity than she anticipated.

“You are very brave, braver than I could possibly be in your place,” Mrs. Graham murmured. “If there was only something I could do, some possible way to make up to you I should not feel so unhappy. Yet for the loss of creative work there is no recompense.”

“Oh, but my work was not so valuable as all that, Mrs. Graham, you are mistaken.

Most of my poetry was the veriest trash. Editors and friends were of the same opinion. Good-by, I will come in again in a day or so, if you will allow me."

The following instant the young man was gone.

Startled and troubled by his swift departure, making an unexpected movement behind her screen, Gill beheld the screen pitch forward and stood facing Mrs. Graham, who had swung around at the unexpected sound.

"You have been in hiding and listening to what Mr. Drain and I were saying to each other, one of the Sunrise Camp Fire girls! I am afraid I do not understand. There was nothing in our conversation you might not have heard openly, had you cared to join us."

There was more surprise than reproach in Mrs. Graham's manner and voice.

Blushing hotly, Mary Gilchrist felt unable to offer a defense. What defense had she to offer?

"I had no thought of listening, not at first, Mrs. Graham. In order not to be seen I hid myself for a moment and then

when you came into the room I did not wish to interrupt you."

Even to her own ears Gill did not feel that her explanation really explained. Therefore she could scarcely resent the slight look of disdain on her companion's face, as she answered:

"You are not a child and under the circumstances I think might have met the situation in a less undignified fashion. As Mrs. Burton is not well I shall not trouble her by speaking of this because I am afraid she would be a good deal displeased."

CHAPTER VII

FRIENDSHIP

THE first snow of the season was falling.

Outside the night was transcendently lovely, the hills covered with white blankets, the trees, surprised at the first winter breath, shaking crumpled leaves of faded gold or bronze to be buried under the snow. On the lake in front of Tahawus cabin there was a light covering of ice, making a bed for the snowflakes.

Overhead the moon shone down upon the winter silence of the woods.

Inside the large cabin the Camp Fire girls were seated about the fire in ceremonial fashion, the Council meeting having just ended. On the mantel the candles were dying, although there was no other light in the room save their flickering flames and the light of the fire.

“Well, good-night, I’ll leave you to your final talk, not because I desire it, but

because I seem to be under orders," Mrs. Burton protested, rising from her usual position in the center of the circle.

A few feet away Mrs. Graham stood waiting for her, and a moment later they had disappeared arm in arm.

Afterwards there was a short silence broken at last by Sally Ashton.

"I wonder why our own Camp Fire club has never produced so devoted a friendship as Tante and Aunt Betty have enjoyed so many years."

"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,

And in their death they were not divided;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions."

"Forgive my quoting," Bettina Graham murmured, "but as we were to talk of friendship to-night after our regular meeting, those lines have been in my mind all day. I like Vera's idea that we choose a subject of conversation at our Camp Fire meetings, once the actual business is over."

At this instant Vera Lageroff was glancing out the window; purposely the blinds

had been left up so as not to shut out the beauty of the night.

She turned now and looked from one girl to the other.

“Is it true what Sally has just said?” she inquired. “Have we no friendships in our own Camp Fire circle as deep and ardent and with the promise of continuing as Mrs. Burton’s and Mrs. Graham’s has for so many years?”

“Oh, Sally is always making amazing speeches! I thought we were all extremely fond of one another. In fact, Vera, perhaps you and I have more things in common because of our work together in France. I don’t believe I shall ever be so content anywhere else,” Alice Ashton remonstrated.

At one of the outermost ends of the semi-circle, close up to the fire, Sally was seated. At this moment she wore a frown between her level brows, but not because she objected to her sister’s statement, which she scarcely had heard, but because she was pursuing her own idea and her mind did not work swiftly.

“Oh, of course I know we are friends after a fashion,” Sally returned, “but I suppose

I was thinking of the David and Jonathan kind of friendship, something big and wonderful and everlasting. I know I have never had anything approaching a great intimacy with any one of you girls in the years we have been together in our Camp Fire club. Gerry and I were extremely friendly, nothing more. After she married Felix we soon ceased even writing to each other."

A moment Sally leaned her chin in her hand.

"In spite of our Sunrise Camp Fire, I believe I have been more intimate with Dan Webster, and he has been a closer, warmer friend to me than any one of you girls. Yet I have not seen much of him since I was a small girl, save the summer in California and for a little while in Paris after the close of the war."

"Well, I think I should not care to make such a confession, Sally Ashton. Our Camp Fire organization was created partly to teach us the value of friendship among girls, and not only friendship but the ability to live together and work together. I consider we have accomplished this with

enough success to be proud," Alice Ashton argued.

The silence was half thoughtful, half antagonistic.

"I by no means agree with Sally. However, I can speak only for myself," Bettina Graham interposed. "The friendships I have had in our Camp Fire club are the deepest in my life. I hardly dare allow myself to think of Peggy Webster's marriage, which is not many months away. Besides, I do not wish to be personal, I suppose none of us do, yet, in spite of Sally's unfaith, I am sure there are other intimate friendships among us. Moreover, what our ideal really should be, is not what Sally suggests, beautiful and inspiring as the story of David and Jonathan. Our intimacy should extend through all our Camp Fire club and we should care for one another almost equally."

In the wide semi-circle, one of the girls had been unusually silent during the evening, indeed had never spoken unless a question were directly addressed to her.

At this instant she looked closely at Bettina Graham with a peculiar expression in which there was appeal and defiance.

“You are an idealist, Bettina, and the type of idealist who demands the impossible. Human beings can not care for one another in the same degree. It is against the law of nature itself. We can be loyal and interested in every member of our Camp Fire group, yet we cannot care for each one alike. You yourself are unable to, for no one has taken Peggy Webster’s place with you, and perhaps no one of us ever shall.”

Half shyly the girls glanced from one to the other when Mary Gilchrist had ceased speaking. Gill dropped her eyes so that their gaze appeared concentrated upon her hands which she held folded together in her lap.

The fact that Gill for many months had made every effort to fill Peggy’s place in Bettina’s friendship was well known to every one of the other girls, except perchance to Bettina herself. Yet if at first Bettina had seemed to welcome the other girl’s admiration and in a measure to return her affection, of late she had kept apart from her as much as possible. Bettina was not unkind, only her manner was cold and

reserved. More openly Mrs. Graham betrayed less liking for Mary Gilchrist than any one of the group of Camp Fire girls.

However, as Marguerite Arnot had come from Paris to live for a time with Mrs. Graham and Bettina, it was but natural that at present they should show a special interest in her.

At this moment, as Bettina made no reply to Mary Gilchrist's implied invitation, Sally interposed with characteristic coolness.

"Oh, I appreciate that I always have been more of an outsider than any other member of our Sunrise Camp Fire. Don't think I am complaining; I realize that I am colder or more selfish and that I have fewer intimacies. But, Vera," Sally's large golden brown eyes caught those of the other girl, who plainly had been thinking of something else, "Vera, to-night, during our discussion of friendship, are you thinking of one of us, or of Billy Webster? Was he not more truly your friend than any member of our Camp Fire?"

"Sally!" came the shocked exclamation from several of the girls at the same instant.

However, Vera Lagerloff's long eyes, with their odd foreign look, met Sally's bravely.

"There is no reason why Sally should not speak of Billy Webster. Please do not think I ever forget him. Yes, Sally, Billy was the best friend I ever had or hope to have. Yet his death in California* has not left me less ready to give my friendship to our Camp Fire. Indeed, I sometimes feel it is only through the Camp Fire and our work in France that I have been able to accept Billy's passing away."

"'He that loseth his life shall gain it,'" Bettina quoted softly.

In the midst of the pause, feeling that her introduction of Billy Webster's memory had made their discussion of friendship more sorrowful than she had intended, and conscious that Alice and Bettina were frowning upon her with varying degrees of severity, Sally turned her gaze from the firelight and her group of friends.

At the instant her attention was attracted by a whirr of snow against the window. It was as if an errant gust of wind had tossed great handfuls against the pane.

* See "Camp Fire Girls at the End of the Trail."

There was a noise outside, a little scuffling, uncertain noise.

Sally looked more closely, and as she looked her eyes widened and her red lips parted. The color faded slowly from her fire-warmed cheeks.

The next instant she was on her feet.

"I saw a face outside the window," she exclaimed. "And one I have seen before!"

Fifteen minutes later the big living-room in the winter cabin at Half Moon Lake was deserted, the discussion on friendship having ended abruptly before it was well begun.

On the mantel the candles representing work, health and love had ceased to glow. There were only a few sparks left to smoulder amid the ashes of the log fire.

No one of the other girls had seen a vision at the window save Sally Ashton, and therefore believed that she had been mistaken. Some animal may have wandered out of the deep woods because of the storm and been attracted by the lights inside the cabin.

Yet the spell was broken and bed appeared the happiest solution.

CHAPTER VIII

MIDWINTER

TO the Sunrise Camp Fire girls the closing in of winter about Tahawus cabin brought a new experience of life. Never in the many seasons spent together under varying conditions had they been so thrown upon their own resources for happiness and growth!

Of the outside world of companionship and stimulation, they had no one and nothing upon which they might depend, and this following two eventful years in Europe during the close and in the months after the great war.

Yet they had been told what they must expect, the quiet, the loneliness, the shut-in-ness of their existence.

Discovering that her health made it unwise to attempt returning to the stage during the winter, Mrs. Burton anticipated spending the winter alone in the Adirondacks save for occasional visits from her

husband and Aunt Patricia, her sister and possibly her friend, Betty Graham.

However, Miss Patricia Lord had been first to decry an arrangement of this character, protesting that since Polly O'Neill Burton appeared unable to look after herself when she was *not* ill, what could one expect of her under other conditions! Personally she had no idea of permitting her to make further trouble for her husband and friends. This was of course Miss Patricia's fashion of confessing that nothing could separate her from the individual she loved best in the world, so long as her care, devotion and wealth could be of service.

Without Mrs. Burton's knowledge Captain Burton and Miss Patricia made a journey to the Adirondacks, where they secured the lease of Tahawus cabin for a year with the privilege of a longer term, and here, a few weeks later, Mrs. Burton found herself established under Miss Patricia's guardianship, her husband being forced to return to his work in Washington.

The maid who accompanied them Miss Patricia soon dismissed, announcing that

she gave more trouble than assistance. And, although regretting her loss, seeing that the girl herself was lonely and unhappy and unable to live in peace with Miss Patricia, Mrs. Burton felt obliged to consent. Later she made a number of efforts to secure another maid (Marie, who had lived with her so many years, having been left behind in France), but up to the present time no one had been discovered agreeable to Miss Patricia.

Annoyed and unhappy over the amount of work Miss Patricia insisted upon undertaking, Mrs. Burton found her protests and efforts toward aid both set aside. Moreover, as rest was essential to her recovery, she dared not undertake heavy tasks.

During the latter part of the summer and the early fall, therefore, she and Miss Patricia lived alone at the cabin, although for various reasons neither of them particularly content.

Miss Patricia's anxiety revealed itself in an increasing sternness and solicitude which left her charge small opportunity for peace.

Mrs. Burton, who was not seriously ill so

long as she was resting and in a proper environment, oftentimes found herself lonely and restless, and ashamed of her discontent.

She was surrounded with every comfort and a good deal of luxury. Her room, twenty feet square, had four large windows facing the south and west; the plastered walls were painted a pale yellow with curtains of a deeper shade. Upholstered in yellow silk with half a dozen yellow and brown silk curtains, was the couch Miss Patricia had ordered from New York to be in keeping with the room. Supplies of magazines and books were sent weekly from town, letters arrived in generous number, occasionally a visitor appeared from one of the hotels or cottages a few miles off, but oftentimes was sent away unseen by Mrs. Burton, Aunt Patricia concluding that she were better left alone if the visitor happened to be not a friend but an acquaintance merely desiring to do homage to a famous woman.

Fortunately Miss Patricia looked with favor upon the physician who made weekly calls upon his patient. Miss Lord had secured a cabin in this particular neighborhood in order that the younger woman might be under his care.

One afternoon during the first week in September, Miss Patricia and Mrs. Burton were sitting in her bed-room between five and six o'clock. The twilight was beginning to close gently in so that a single lamp was lighted on a table which stood near Mrs. Burton's couch. Lying upon the couch, she was holding a newspaper open in her hand, but at the moment was not reading.

A few feet away Miss Patricia sat grimly hemming dish towels.

Neither had spoken in the last ten minutes, not since Dr. Larimer, after an hour's visit, had driven away.

"You are an extremely entertaining companion, Polly. Do you realize you scarcely have spoken to me all day, and yet you seemed to find a great deal to discuss with Dr. Larimer; perhaps because he is a man and I am only a woman."

Swiftly Mrs. Burton dropped the paper which had been hiding her face.

"I am so sorry, dear, to have been so stupid; I have been reading since Dr. Larimer's visit. But it is unkind of you to say I preferred talking to Dr. Larimer for such a reason, when you know what I wanted to discuss with him."

"Yes, and his answer was exactly what I anticipated," Miss Patricia answered severely, although her eyes were now searching the younger woman's face. "Polly, I desire you to be truthful, even when the truth appears less complimentary to me. In the last few minutes you have not read a single line. I have been watching you and——"

The paper slid to the floor as Mrs. Burton sat up clasping her arms about her knees. Her corded yellow silk gown with a soft fall of lace about her throat had been put on in honor of the doctor's call; her black hair was loosely coiled on top of her head, her cheeks too brightly flushed, her blue eyes less clear than usual.

"Come and sit beside me, Aunt Patricia, please do as I want to make a confession. It is true I have not been reading these last few minutes because a few moments ago I read the announcement of a brilliant new play produced in New York City last week and I was envious and rebellious. Of course I really expected to have Dr. Larimer declare that I must remain all winter in the mountains and yet I must have hoped

he would allow me to return to town after a few more months. I am sorry of course, but really, Aunt Patricia, you must not bury yourself here with me, when I am such a burden besides being a stupid companion."

"Don't talk nonsense, Polly, if you can avoid it," was Miss Patricia's reply. Yet she came and seated herself on the couch beside the younger woman, and by and by her arm was about her.

"See here, my child," she announced a few moments later, "the truth is, I am neither lonely nor dissatisfied, but *you* are. I am never unhappy when I am with you. However, that is neither here nor there. Naturally you need other companionship than an excessively disagreeable old woman. Your husband cannot be with you this winter, his work makes it impossible. I have been thinking for several days of an idea which I discussed with the doctor this afternoon after his conversation with you. Why not have your own Camp Fire girls to spend the winter at the cabin with you? You are accustomed to them and they would keep you interested and able to give less

time to thinking of yourself. Dr. Larimer has no objection; says you will grow stronger as soon as you are in a more cheerful frame of mind. Would you like to have the girls, dear, because if so, in the last ten moments before I reproached you for not speaking, I had been planning a letter to each one of the girls which I shall write to-night, once you are asleep."

"I am afraid they won't care to join us here, Aunt Patricia. The winter will be so long and cold and at present the Camp Fire girls are in their own homes. You must not on my account ask them to come to us; we shall be happy alone, except now and then when I am especially tiresome."

However, at the mere suggestion Mrs. Burton's face had flushed, her eyes were no longer clouded and a bit of her old animation had returned.

"Our invitation to the Sunrise Camp Fire girls shall not imply a favor to us should they care to accept. I shall also tell them what they are to expect," Miss Patricia added. "If they elect to spend a winter in the Adirondack forest, it will be of benefit to their health as well as to yours.

Moreover, do not believe that I am issuing this invitation solely on your account, Polly. More than I dreamed possible I am missing the Camp Fire girls myself, particularly Vera and Alice, who are more sensible than the others."

Later in the same evening, while Mrs. Burton lay half asleep on her couch, seated not far away Miss Patricia Lord wrote her letters of invitation. She kept her word; the letters mentioned the conditions the girls would be forced to meet, the long cold, the quiet days and nights and the fact that they could count on but little society or entertainment save what they could create among themselves. However, the cabin was comfortable and the surroundings beautiful. In only one line did Miss Patricia betray the fact that she believed their Camp Fire guardian's health might be improved by the companionship of the group of girls who had meant so much to her in the past years.

Yet it may have been this line that represented the necessary influence, or merely that the girls enjoyed the novelty of a winter in the North woods.

Whatever the reason, October found them living together in their accustomed fashion and now October had passed and November and it was the first week of December.

So far, according to the woodsmen, the winter had been a remarkably open one.

One Friday afternoon, soon after luncheon, Mary Gilchrist came out of the cabin alone. A short time before Mrs. Burton, Mrs. Graham and Marguerite Arnot had gone for a drive, the rough little pony they had been using earlier in the season was now transferred from the carriage to a sleigh.

Ordinarily the Camp Fire guardian preferred the girls not to go any distance away from Tahawus cabin alone. So, as she had found it difficult to secure a companion, Gill had no thought of being outdoors more than an hour. Fresh air and exercise were essential to her health and happiness.

Sally, who first had been asked to accompany her, disliking the cold and none too fond of exercise, had pleaded the fact that she was busily engaged in preparing mincemeat for the approaching Christmas holidays and desired to go on with her task.

Bettina Graham, Gill preferred not to invite, believing that Bettina would surely decline. Alice Ashton and Vera were at work on their Christmas sewing and had a walk of several miles earlier in the day.

Promising Sally to bring back any winter berries or evergreens she might discover, at three o'clock Gill set forth alone. She was dressed in a short skirt and a gray fur coat and cap and was wearing snowshoes.

No snow had fallen for the past week and there was a hard layer of ice. The afternoon was cloudless and brilliant, the sky above the tree tops ravishingly blue.

A number of paths led away from the door of the cabin and Gill started along one which came down to the edge of the lake. As the lake was frozen over, she followed the line of the west shore for about half a mile, gliding along on the ice, her cheeks tingling, her eyes sparkling with the delight of the exercise and the exhilaration of the winter air. Not in some time had she felt so serene. These past few weeks for several reasons had been as uncomfortable ones as she ever cared to live through. Fortunately she always had believed in the value of an

outdoor life to bring one to more cheerful views, even before her membership in the Camp Fire had emphasized this truth.

Tiring of the smooth surface of the lake, at length Gill climbed a snowdrift to enter a balsam forest which seemed to cover only a small area before it opened into a clearing beyond.

At no great distance from their own cabin, Gill had no recollection at the moment of this particular woods, perhaps because the winter afternoon gave it a new and strange aspect.

She recognized that the trees were white pine, many of them fifty feet in height with drooping long branches and five-fingered leaf bunches. Beneath the trees the ground, soft with the needles at other seasons, was to-day hard and white as a marble bed.

The arch of the trees formed a kind of natural temple with the opening beyond like a great rose window seen through the intervening space.

As she approached the end of the vista Gill heard a noise which at first startled and later on puzzled and troubled her.

The noise was like the barking of a dog in distress. She stood still, called and whistled only to have the sound cease and then begin again with a deeper note of suffering.

Continuing her walk, but more slowly, Gill moved in the direction from which the barking came. In spite of what may have appeared to contradict this fact, actually she was more attached to animals than any one of the Camp Fire girls. Within another moment she had made a discovery. In a trap set by a hunter a small red fox had been caught but not killed. The barking to her ears had sounded like a dog's.

Notwithstanding its pain and terror and fear of human beings, it seemed to Gill the little animal turned its red-brown eyes toward her with an expression of appeal.

Several seconds the girl stood frowning and puzzled, all her color flown and her lips trembling. Her own ignorance and cowardice formed the chief barrier. The little animal's hind feet had been caught and nearly torn from the body, and yet she was unable to open the trap or to relieve the pain in any way, as she carried no weapon of any kind.

Gill set her teeth. Why not walk on or, a better plan, return to the warmth and friendliness of the big cabin. Of a sudden she felt lonely and vaguely uneasy here in the silent woods, the silence broken only by the cry of a small animal in pain. Yet the pain could not continue indefinitely, and in any event she could soon be out of sight and hearing.

Gill's eyes dropped toward the ground. Immediately in her path she beheld a heavy stick, from which the snow had blown away, leaving it exposed to her gaze. A second only she hesitated, then picking it up discovered that the end was round and thick as a bludgeon. She knew that her eye and her aim were unswerving, yet the prospect of a moment's swift action made her sick and faint.

The next Gill lifted her cudgel. With a quick stroke between the eyes that were fastened half fearfully, half trustfully upon her own, the little creature's suffering was ended.

Afterwards, absurd as it seemed to her, Gill could not walk on at once. Instead she leaned against a nearby tree, closing

her eyes to avoid the spectacle before her. She could hunt without especial emotion or regret, when her aim was steady and there was no suggestion of long pain or suffering afterwards. But to kill, as she had felt herself forced to do in the last few moments, had upset her in the most acute fashion.

Gill opened her eyes when she heard some one coming toward her.

"You seem to appear only when I am in the act of taking a life, Mr. Drain," she exclaimed with poorly concealed bitterness, allowing her state of mind to find expression in the tone of her voice. "I am sorry to have you a witness to what I have just done and yet I felt it was unavoidable."

"You have only accomplished what I have been trying to find courage to do this last half hour, Miss Gilchrist. But you do look used up. My little cabin is not an eighth of a mile away, won't you come in and rest for a moment? I am sure your friends will not object. I am fairly intimate with most of them except you. Somehow we never seem to meet when I am at Tahawus cabin."

CHAPTER IX

THE POET'S CORNER

THE little pine house had only two rooms, one a small bed-room, the other serving as kitchen, dining-room and living-room. As there was no furnace and a wood fire would afford insufficient heat, an old-fashioned stove extended its stove pipe up the fireplace chimney.

This stove, packed tight with small chunks of wood, was now red hot and on top a kettle was pouring forth a thin stream of steam.

Allan Drain kneeled down.

"You'll allow me to take off your snow-shoes so you can be more comfortable? I envy you your skill in being able to manage them as I have been struggling for several weeks without success. Please don't mind the small amount of snow you have brought into the room. I am not a particular housekeeper."

Gill glanced about the room.

"I am not so sure. It seems to me you have arranged your room in a satisfactory and at the same time a picturesque fashion."

"Oh, my belongings are few and simple after the grandeur of your cabin. I only brought a bed and a table and a chair and some books along with me. Since, I have been lucky enough to get hold of a few possessions left behind in the North woods by fellows who once were in pretty much the same fix I am. I have made the rest of the furniture myself from the wood I bought at a lumber camp not far off. See that book shelf to the left of the mantle; it was given me by a backwood's preacher, an old man who says it once belonged to Robert Louis Stevenson. You know Stevenson spent a winter in the Adirondacks for his health, don't you? He and my old woodsman, who was a young fellow then, became friends."

Gill nodded, but not so impressed as her companion had expected and hoped.

"Yes, I heard Mrs. Burton and Bettina Graham talking of the famous men and women who have lived in the Adirondack forests. Besides Stevenson there was a

'Philosopher's Camp' with Emerson and James Russell Lowell and Professor Agassiz as members. Perhaps they may be an inspiration to you, but I cannot say I feel any deep interest. I told you I was not in the least literary and that I cared for the outdoors and not for books."

Whether or not she intended this, there was a slightly contemptuous note in the girl's voice.

Her companion, having removed her snowshoes, rose quickly with his face slightly flushed.

"You'll have a cup of tea with me. The water is boiling so I can have it ready in a few minutes. It will warm you after your walk."

As Gill nodded acquiescence, quickly and deftly as a girl Allan Drain set about his preparations.

His tea service consisted of a brown earthenware teapot, two cups and saucers, a cheap little pitcher and a silver sugar bowl of rare beauty, evidently an heirloom.

He had placed on the table a pot of gooseberry jam and now undertook to make the toast by opening his stove door and toasting the bread at the end of a long fork.

Offering no assistance, Gill sat watching, glancing sometimes at her host and as often at his surroundings.

Truly he had revealed ingenuity and taste in his arrangements, in spite of the scarcity and poverty of his furnishings. In the first place, the room was clean, the floor swept, the books and furniture dusted. On the walls were several unframed sketches and photographs made by amateur artists, pictures of the North woods in summer or autumn beauty. Fastened alongside were the skins of a raccoon and a beaver; on the floor, although somewhat the worse for wear, a large bearskin rug. There were two chairs and a table of crude but not ugly workmanship. Gill discovered herself enthroned in the solitary chair her host had brought with him for his lonely winter in the forest.

"I should think you would have preferred to be at a hotel or a hospital for the winter if you are not well," she volunteered a few moments later when her host had placed her chair in front of one of his tables where his little feast was spread.

In spite of the fact that she was enjoying

her tea, Gill found conversation difficult with an individual whose tastes and point of view were so unlike her own.

"I should think you would be desperately lonely here; you see it is different with us, there are so many of us and we are accustomed to being together."

As Allan Drain lifted the teapot his long, slender hand shook slightly.

"Why, yes, I am often lonely," he agreed. "It would be absurd for me to deny it. I live in this fashion rather than in a hotel or boarding house because it is much cheaper. My people have no money to spare and the uncle who has been paying for my education as a surgeon is annoyed at my break-down. He declares that if I were less antagonistic to my work I would never have gone to pieces. In fact, he thinks I am enjoying myself living alone in the woods with an opportunity to write poetry and dream, which is all he believes I care for, and he is not so far from right. I know you will have a contempt for me, but I tried my best to make up my mind to do what you managed to accomplish in a few seconds, relieve a little animal from

pain. If I had not the nerve or the courage to be of help to an animal, what do you think of my chance of being of service to human beings?"

"I don't think you will be of *any use* at all," Gill answered abruptly, and then it was her turn to flush, not because it troubled her that she may have wounded her companion, but because she had been uncomfortably conscious of the abruptness and awkwardness of her manner ever since her interview with Mrs. Graham. This was only a fresh instance of her lack of poise and tact, which seemed so conspicuous in Mrs. Graham and Bettina and which she so admired.

In spite of his courtesy and kindness at the present time, Gill was still convinced that she did not like Allan Drain and could never like him under any circumstances. The antagonism of their first meeting was only asleep and might wake again at any moment. Surely he must like her even less and with better reason. This afternoon he was only returning the hospitality he had received from other members of her own Camp Fire group.

When her host arose to replenish the fire Gill studied him closely. She was again positive that she did not care for his appearance. The yellow hair bronzed by the sun until it was nearly the color of a lion's mane was worn too long, the figure was too slender and without sufficient force, the broad shoulders stooped. Yet perhaps he was not so effeminate in appearance as she originally had thought; the effect was rather due to delicacy.

Selfishly Gill uttered an inward breath of thankfulness, grateful for her own perfect health. Never had she felt more vigorous than to-day. Already she was growing tired of the little room and her host and anxious to return home.

"Well, I am sure you must find a great deal to keep you busy. Thank you for asking me to see your house. I must say good-by now and hurry back to the cabin. I am afraid it is growing late."

Insisting on adjusting her own snow-shoes, Gill stood at the door of the cabin with her back to the wall, smiling her farewell.

If her opinion of Allan Drain had not

altered, his impression of her had slightly changed. This afternoon he did not so much dislike her half boyish appearance, the bobbed hair of a bright auburn color, the short nose and wide mouth with the white, firm teeth.

"I am sorry to have you go. I would walk back with you to Tahawus cabin with pleasure, but as I cannot manage my snow-shoes without half a dozen headers I should only bore and delay you. Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Burton have been good enough to say I may come and share in your Christmas festivities. You are expecting many guests, aren't you? The time is not far off and I shall try to keep so busy with my writing that the days will fly until then."

"Do you mean that you are re-writing the verses that were lost at our cabin? I suppose they will be all the better for the added work," Gill said hastily and in a tone of relief.

"Oh, no, not the poor old verses over again!" her companion returned. "I haven't the courage, besides the fates must have known they were of no value and spared me the task of making away with them.

I know it is ridiculous of me, but actually I am attempting to write a play. Mrs. Burton suggested the idea when we were talking together, although she is unaware of the fact. I know it will amount to nothing, so please keep my secret. I don't know why I should have mentioned it to you, except that I have not seen another human being for two days. Well, good-by if you must go, and thank you for your visit. My best wishes to Tahawus cabin."

CHAPTER X

HOLIDAY GUESTS

ARRANGEMENTS at Tahawus cabin were to be readjusted to meet the approach of Christmas guests, especially as the household was a strictly feminine one and a number of the guests were masculine.

Captain Burton would come up from Washington city to be with his wife for a few days, if not the entire length of the holiday.

Dan Webster with his mother and sister, Peggy, intended spending several weeks. Mrs. Webster had been unable to see her sister except for a few days since her return from Europe. Peggy Webster desired a rest and a farewell holiday with her group of Camp Fire girls before her marriage to Ralph Merritt. Therefore Ralph was to be a few days at the cabin but was not to remain the entire length of Peggy's stay.

A third visitor, who had not the excuse

of family relationship, was David Hale, a young American whom the Camp Fire girls met originally in France during the days of the Peace Conference.*

At that time he had been an especial friend of Bettina Graham's and of the French girl, Marguerite Arnot, but later on both girls had lost sight of him, since Bettina only answered his letters occasionally and he had never written Marguerite.

However, he had returned to the United States with the closing of his work as secretary to a prominent member of the Peace Council and since had lived in Washington city.

Through a note of introduction from Bettina he had met her mother and father, and he and Mrs. Graham had become fast friends. Indeed, for a number of years Betty Graham had held a small court of young men about her in Washington, to whom she represented their ideal of what a gracious and beautiful woman should be. The situation always had amused her husband and friends, and Bettina openly declared that she cherished not the faintest

* See "Camp Fire Girls in Glorious France."

hope of becoming her mother's rival. As a matter of fact, she was not especially popular. So she was scarcely surprised, and not in the least annoyed, upon arriving at the conclusion that her mother had supplanted her in David Hale's friendship. True, she had liked him in France, where they seemed to have many points of congeniality! But some little time had passed since then and other interests had interfered with her original impression. Nevertheless, she was glad to accept her mother's suggestion that they ask David Hale to make one of their Christmas house party. The other girls had liked him, Miss Patricia had treated him with marked favor, and there was little doubt that he would add to everybody's pleasure.

Now and then Bettina had wondered if Marguerite Arnot were homesick or regretted leaving her own country for the United States. True, she had said nothing to suggest this, yet she was as reserved as Bettina herself! Moreover, so far she had not in any way been thrown upon her own resources, part of her time in America she had spent with her mother and herself

and the rest with Miss Patricia Lord. After the Camp Fire winter was over her future was less assured unless she should choose to remain in Washington city with them. Undoubtedly Marguerite had proved extremely useful to her mother with her pretty, quiet manner and her gift for sewing. Yet her position in their household had been a little difficult, due more to Marguerite's shyness and her refusal to take part in the social life of Washington as their friend, which was the position she and her mother both wished Marguerite to accept.

So Bettina, recalling the fact that Marguerite Arnot had in her quiet fashion displayed pleasure in David Hale's acquaintance, regarded this as another reason to be pleased with his appearance at the Christmas house party. During the weeks she and Marguerite were in Washington city, they had been able to see David Hale only once, as he chanced to be west at the time on official business.

Never before had Bettina thought of herself in the light of a matchmaker, so, secretly, she was amused by her present

point of view. Marguerite Arnot and David Hale were her friends and one always possessed the right to wish happiness for one's friends. Now the Adirondack woods in their winter cloak were like fairy-land, so wonderful that Bettina, had she not been sure she was proof against romance, must have felt their romantic influence. She did feel their inspiration and their beauty every hour of the day. But Bettina had arranged a future for herself in which an ordinary romance played no part, and by ordinary romance she meant the eternal romance of youth.

Dr. and Mrs. Ashton, Alice's and Sally's parents, were to arrive from Boston, bringing with them a distant cousin, a youth of about nineteen or twenty whom neither girl had seen in a number of years.

One change in their household arrangements upon which the Camp Fire guardian and Mrs. Graham both insisted was that during the holiday season some one be secured to assist with the domestic work, else with so many additional people to be cared for, the girls would be worn out and have little time for pleasure.

Mrs. Burton had another reason which she did not choose to make public. She dreaded the added strain upon Miss Patricia, who in spite of her wonderful vigor and energy would doubtless wear herself to the breaking point and be extremely difficult in consequence. At the close of her reconstruction work in France to which she had devoted herself she had reached England in a state of nervous and physical exhaustion. However, after a few weeks of travel and rest she had entirely recovered. Notwithstanding, Mrs. Burton could not refrain from worrying over Miss Patricia's unfailing care of her, in which she seemed unwilling to allow any one else to share. Any human being with less tact than Mrs. Graham would long since have met with Miss Patricia's disapproval. She did manage, however, to spend several hours each day with her friend without incurring Miss Patricia's anger, and in small ways, never in more important ones, to relieve the older woman's constant vigilance. As a matter of fact, Betty Graham was a decided favorite with Aunt Patricia and had been for a number of years. Many times she

was heard to announce that she wished Polly Burton were possessed of an equal amount of sweetness and good judgment. Moreover, Miss Patricia really recognized the claim of the friendship older than her own, and although now and then suffering twinges of jealousy, usually kept them to herself.

Yet even Aunt Patricia had not protested against the instalment of some one to help with the Christmas festivities, provided a suitable person could be discovered. And the good fortune in the situation was that Miss Patricia made the discovery herself.

David Murray, who helped with the outside work and cared for the furnace, was an old bachelor living in a small cabin a mile or more away and yet the closest neighbor to the Camp Fire girls.

Old David was as much of a character in his way as Miss Patricia in hers, disliking the feminine sex with greater intensity than Miss Patricia bestowed upon his, as Miss Patricia's dislike of men never had been satisfactorily proven save by her spinsterhood.

Some time before David had confided to Miss Patricia that a letter from his half sister, Elspeth, had informed him of the fact that she was tired of "working out" and was coming to live with him. He did not wish her society and had stated the fact plainly.

"Yet knowin' the ways of women, Miss Pat-ricia, if she has made up her mind to it, she'll come. She knows a man can't set a woman outside his door to freeze weather like this even if he has a mind to."

A few weeks later with all her possessions Elspeth arrived and finding her brother away, had pushed open the door. There she was upon his return making herself thoroughly at home.

However, the cottage was small and David was "dour", so Elspeth was soon willing to make friends with the Camp Fire girls and to agree to come and live with them at Christmas time. She and Miss Patricia were even a little alike, since one was of Scotch descent and the other Irish. Miss Patricia promised to leave the cooking and housekeeping to Elspeth and the Camp Fire girls, so long as nothing interfered with

her care of Mrs. Burton, which, after all, consisted largely in seeing that she ate and slept more than she wished and was in the fresh air whenever it was possible.

Mrs. Burton had pleaded for a little more freedom during the holidays and had her request denied with the threat that the house party itself should be abandoned unless she agreed to follow her usual régime.

So the big cabin before the arrival of the Christmas guests was filled with the odors of cooking and cleaning and the smell of evergreens.

The arrangement was that the married people and Camp Fire girls should live in the big house and the smallest of the cabins and the other be devoted to Dan Webster, David Hale, and Philip Stead, the unknown cousin of Alice and Sally Ashton.

Mrs. Graham had suggested that Allan Drain be invited to spend a few days at the cabin rather than be forced to return to his own home when he was sharing their amusements. But as no one had met the proposal with any enthusiasm she had said nothing more. Her own desire was to make

up to the young fellow in any possible way for the loss for which she felt increasingly responsible.

Captain Burton was to arrive before any other member of the house party. Instead of trusting to an automobile or a sleigh that might be had at Saranac, the nearest village, old David drove over to meet his train, due at about five o'clock in the afternoon.

At six o'clock every light in Tahawus cabin was burning brightly, a fire in the living-room roared and crackled like imprisoned music, dinner was in fullest preparation.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Burton, Mrs. Graham and Miss Patricia were dressed and waiting with every now and then one of the Camp Fire girls flitting in and out with a question or a piece of information. A few days later and the cabin would be overflowing with guests. For this reason the Camp Fire guardian had wished her husband to appear before any one else.

Between half-past six and seven he could be looked for at the cabin, as the drive from Saranac occupied something more than an hour.

But at seven o'clock Captain Burton had

not come; at half-past seven Miss Patricia insisted that dinner be served and Captain Burton's set aside. At eight o'clock she demanded that Mrs. Burton go to her room and lie down. Undoubtedly Captain Burton's train had been delayed. Evidently David was still awaiting him.

After half an hour of protest, as Miss Patricia remained firm and Mrs. Graham added her persuasions to Aunt Patricia's commands, the Camp Fire guardian finally did retire, appreciating that she would be in a better state to receive her husband and wishing him to see at once how much she had improved.

A little after nine it chanced that the half dozen Camp Fire girls were in the living-room alone, Bettina playing softly on the piano and Chitty imitating the notes with her flute-like voice, when they heard the noise of David and the sleigh approaching.

Fearing that their Camp Fire guardian might be disappointed in case something had prevented Captain Burton's arrival, Bettina and Alice Ashton ran into the hall opening the door before there was an outside noise.

The next moment Captain Burton strode in. He was not alone; accompanying him was a girl wrapped in a shabby gray cloak and with a warm scarf tied about her head partly concealing her face.

“Where is Polly? I must see her at once. We had a wreck on the road and a storm also delayed us. Bettina, will you and Alice please look after Miss Temple, Juliet Temple, and persuade her to eat dinner and go to bed. I’ll introduce you to each other more satisfactorily in the morning.”

If Bettina and Alice were startled and none too pleased by an unexpected guest under the present conditions, they were too kind to show their attitude, observing that the strange girl looked completely exhausted.

CHAPTER XI

JULIET TEMPLE

“**B**UT, my dear, do you think this the proper time to introduce a stranger into our household?”

Mrs. Burton and Captain Burton were walking up and down outside Tahawus cabin the following morning. Wearing a sealskin coat and a small fur hat and muff, little was visible except Mrs. Burton’s eyes and the brilliant color in her cheeks wrought by the still, clear cold.

Captain Burton, who was a good deal older, was a middle-aged man with iron-gray hair and dark eyes; a handsome, erect figure, considerably taller than his companion.

“Why, no, I suppose not, Polly,” he returned, “but I explained to you the circumstances were exceptional. Here was a girl who had been living in the same boarding place with me, to whom I had been saying good-morning and good-evening for

a number of weeks and now and then stopping to talk for a few moments, suddenly turned out into the world with no money and apparently no friends whom she could ask to aid her. I believe she has friends, but preferred being independent. Had I not assured her you were greatly in need of some one, she would not have come to you. She was careful to tell me that although she had studied nursing a short time, she was not a professional nurse, having given up her studies in order to take a position in Washington during the war, being in need of funds and unable to wait for her graduation.

I convinced her that you were not so ill as to require professional care, but required some one to wait upon you, prepare special dishes and write letters. In fact, I even told her that a part of her work would be that of a maid, but that I was sure you would be extremely kind and that living with you was a pleasure, Polly, under almost any conditions."

Mrs. Burton laughed.

"That was very kind of you, dear, but scarcely true. I have an idea that Miss

Temple will form a different impression of my character as an invalid if she overhears Aunt Patricia's report of me. Besides, Richard, don't you realize that Aunt Patricia will never permit Miss Temple to usurp her duties, which seem to consist in forcing me to eat more food and sleep a greater number of hours than any human being reasonably can manage. As for the other tasks, which I am perfectly well able to accomplish for myself, there are half a dozen of the Camp Fire girls more than willing to do whatever I ask. Then there is my beloved Betty Graham whom I have not seen intimately in a number of years. We have made a secret arrangement by which she pretends to be acting as my secretary in order that we may have a few quiet hours together. As I do not write a dozen letters a week and ordinarily write them myself, Betty does not find her duties arduous. Really I do not see what Miss Temple is to do for me or for any one else. I am sorry for her of course, but just at present the cabin is to be unusually crowded. If the girl has no money I suppose we must see that she is able to board somewhere for a time,

although we haven't a great deal of money ourselves these days, have we?

"I do wish Aunt Patricia were not so generous. It is ridiculous for me to be living in this state! Please don't let her find out we must help Miss Temple until she is able to secure work. She would then insist upon undertaking the responsibility, besides being immensely aggrieved at our having thought of it. Her one idea is that I shall have no reason to say I must go back to work in order to help restore our fortunes. Aunt Patricia seems to object to everything in connection with the stage these days, when once upon a time she loved it dearly."

"But, Polly, Miss Temple will not accept money. I offered to lend her a small amount which she could repay when she chose, but she declared that I was a comparative stranger, and if she were forced to borrow money had best apply to some one who had known her longer and more intimately.

"What I don't understand is why you wrote me that you and Aunt Patricia were greatly in need of some one and that you

were much worried over Aunt Patricia's breaking down. I have had this in mind some time and been worried. Women are so extraordinarily inconsistent!"

"Yes, and men so extraordinarily dull sometimes, my dear. I plead guilty; I did write you what you accuse me of, but that was *months* ago when Aunt Patricia and I were living here alone. Since then, as you know, our household has changed completely. Betty is here and all the Camp Fire girls, and we even have a jewel of a cook, Elspeth. You must talk to her. Her people have lived in the Adirondacks for years and yet she still has a trace of a Scotch accent and uses Scotch words now and then."

"Very well, as I know Miss Temple and you do not, I presume I had best try to explain the situation. But I must say I am disappointed. I thought you were particularly sympathetic with young girls, Polly, after your experience as a Camp Fire guardian. As far as I know Juliet Temple is a charming girl and I see no reason why she cannot be made a member of your Sunrise Camp Fire club.

Long ago Polly O'Neill had been fairly well known among her family and friends for her quick temper, but the years and life's discipline had taught her a measure of self-control.

She flushed now and bit her lips.

"Richard, you are not fair," she said finally. "I *do* care for girls and I *am* sorry for this Miss Temple. But I cannot undertake to rescue every girl who is in a difficulty. And as for making her a member of our Camp Fire, I do wish you would try to understand something of the Camp Fire organization. The guardian does not select the members of a Camp Fire club. She may suggest a girl, but the choice really rests with the other girls. I should never think of asking my group of girls to include any one who is a stranger and might be wholly uncongenial. Besides, there are certain tests before any girl can join the Camp Fire. How old is this Juliet Temple?"

"Only eighteen, I believe. She wishes to be thought older; has been forced to give the impression because of being obliged to earn her living."

Not liking the suggestion of deceit and

not having been attracted toward the newcomer at their single brief meeting earlier in the day, Mrs. Burton continued her walk, saying nothing more.

Finally she laid her hand on her husband's coat sleeve.

"Let's not quarrel, dear, when we have not been together in so long a time. I shall never be able to like your Miss Temple if she has made you angry with me."

"Nonsense, but here comes Aunt Patricia and I will ask her advice, Polly. She is the greatest trump in the world and I owe her more than I shall ever owe anyone for her devotion to you."

As Miss Patricia approached she was seen to be wearing a heavy, long black coat and a soft gray felt hat belonging to one of the Camp Fire girls which, perched on top of her head, gave her a **rakish** appearance.

Expecting to be ordered indoors, Mrs. Burton observed that Miss Patricia was in a particularly softened mood, due probably to the arrival of Captain Burton, to whom she was devoted.

"Polly is looking better, don't you think, Richard? Yet it has been very difficult to persuade her to do the things she should."

Mrs. Burton slipped an arm through Miss Patricia's. Captain Burton took her other arm and the three continued to promenade.

"Absurd, Aunt Patricia, I have been a perfect invalid! Some day you are going to be sorry for all the unkind things you say about me! I wish you would not just at present, because Richard probably will agree with you."

Miss Patricia studied her two friends closely.

"Polly is not to be worried, Richard," she said finally.

The younger woman laughed.

"See, one can make anything useful, even ill health! Aunt Patricia, we have not quarreled seriously. Our difficulty concerns the girl, Juliet Temple, whom Richard brought to us last evening. I don't see just how she is to fit into our household under the present circumstances, while Richard has a different point of view."

"Yes," said Richard, "and I appeal to you, Aunt Patricia. After all, Tahawus cabin belongs to you and not to Polly. Here I have been attempting to play knight-

errant and my wife declines to uphold me. A sorry knight-errant indeed!"

Five minutes later Miss Patricia was saying conclusively:

"The girl shall stay here through the Christmas holidays. No one shall be without a home and friends at such a season. It will be difficult I know, Polly dear, but if you will talk to the Camp Fire girls they will be kinder to Miss Temple than any request from me could make them. Strange as it may seem to you, Richard, the Camp Fire girls are devoted to Polly and she has an extraordinary influence over them all. But Polly is quite right, we cannot consider asking the girl to become a member of our Camp Fire until we discover whether or not the other girls like and approve of her. You seem to know singularly little concerning your own protégée, sir."

Mrs. Burton's laughter held a note of teasing, as Aunt Patricia's directness was always amusing unless one chanced to be the victim.

"Yes, well, perhaps that is true, but she comes of excellent family, I believe."

"I care little about family, the question is of the girl herself. Remember, I was a poor Irish girl until my brother left me his fortune, and have no aristocratic leanings. Polly and I will leave you and talk to the girl herself. I have little opinion of a man's judgment in such a case."

"What is the matter with Richard, Polly, he looks worried?" Miss Patricia demanded as they moved away. "Is it a question of money?"

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"I don't think so, Aunt Patricia, at least he said nothing to me."

Inside the cabin the Camp Fire girls were not visible at the present time. Several of them were engaged with final Christmas preparations, the others had gone for a walk with Betty Graham.

Inside the living-room, sitting alone by the fire, was the solitary girl who had appeared so unceremoniously the evening before.

She was crouched on the floor upon a low stool looking in the flames when Mrs. Burton and Miss Lord entered, but rose up hastily.

Unusually tall, although not so tall as Miss Patricia, Juliet Temple had ash-colored brown hair and gray eyes and a shy, almost colorless manner.

"I am sorry to have intruded upon you in this fashion, Mrs. Burton," she began. "I suddenly lost my position in Washington and Captain Burton was so kind, I did not altogether realize what I was doing in coming to you like this. Now I can see that you can have no possible use for me with so many girls about you. If you will be kind enough to have some one drive me back to the village I shall not trouble you further."

Mrs. Burton put out her hand toward the unknown visitor in a friendly fashion.

"You will stay with us a few days in any case, won't you, Miss Temple?" Perhaps after all you may be able to do something for me, or for all of us. Who knows? But in any event you must not think of leaving us until we know that you go to friends, where you will be happy. Was there, by chance, anything beside the loss of your position that made you wish to leave Washington at once?"

The girl hesitated and then spoke quickly:

"Yes, there was a reason. May I tell you what it was before you decide to allow me to stay with you even a short time?"

The girl's colorless face flushed warmly and her listless manner so altered that Miss Patricia stared at her in surprise. In another moment she became convinced that the newcomer had taken a sudden intense fancy to Mrs. Burton. She had seen this same thing occur before. Moreover, she doubtless had some romantic story that it pleased her to think of confiding to so famous a woman as Mrs. Burton.

Miss Patricia straightway left the room.

The instant after Juliet Temple stood facing her companion.

"Mrs. Burton, allow me to tell you at once, while I have the courage. I could not explain to Captain Burton, I did not feel I could to any human being until I met you. I was accused of having stolen a small sum of money from the department at which I was at work in Washington. It was not true and yet I have only my word to give you. My father was an army man and a distinguished officer during the Span-

ish war, so for his sake and because the sum was small I was dismissed from my position instead of being prosecuted. You can see now why I did not wish to appeal to friends to whom I would have felt I must make this same confession."

The girl's expression scarcely altered save that she became a shade paler and the lines about her mouth deepened.

"Why would it not have been wiser to have remained in Washington and proved your innocence?" Mrs. Burton inquired, frowning a trifle and wondering why her antagonism toward the girl had lessened rather than been increased by her story.

Juliet Temple gave a despairing shrug to her shoulders.

"It would have been useless, I would not have been permitted to continue at my work. I could not have lived on in Washington without money. I have but little hope that I shall ever be cleared, yet if you think I am guilty, and you have no reason to believe otherwise, you must let me go away at once, this afternoon."

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"No, I really wish you to stay, and I did

not until this moment. At least you must remain for a time until we learn to know whether we like and trust each other."

Mrs. Burton held out her hand a second time and Juliet Temple touched her lips to it without replying.

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDS THAT WERE

TOWARD noon the next day the half dozen other guests arrived, leaving only Ralph Merritt to follow later. He was not expected until Christmas eve, so affording Peggy Webster a few days with her family and friends.

Immediately upon her arrival the Camp Fire girls formed a circle about her and as soon as possible bore her off to a room in one of the smaller cabins devoted exclusively to their use.

This room was known as "The Study". Formerly it had been the living-room in the smaller house, but at present was lined with books and filled with Camp Fire trophies, baskets, embroidery, sofa cushions, odd pieces of weaving, and the Camp Fire photographs depicting their various experiences, which the girls always carried with them.

After the midday dinner the older guests

continued to sit about the big fire in the living-room. David Hale, Dan Webster and Philip Stead were invited to entertain themselves for a short time without their hostesses.

It was a little past two o'clock when Sally Ashton, who had been sitting curled up on a corner of a sofa, not talking so much as her companions, suddenly remarked:

"Don't you think we might spare Peggy any more questions for this one afternoon? Whether she will confess to it or not, she is looking tired. Besides, I feel that we should pay more attention to our other visitors. I do not mean mother and father, I am thinking of——"

Greeted by an outburst of laughter, Sally appeared mystified.

"No, Sally dear, think not that we expect you to be interested in the entertainment of mere parents! The other visitors you refer to are masculine. Well, as they usually are attentive to you, after all there is no reason why you should not return the compliment."

"Neither is there any reason why you

should be so tiresome, Alice. I was only going to propose that we go for a walk before tea-time. The afternoon is clear and there always is the possibility of a snow storm by to-morrow. Perhaps in spite of Alice's sarcasm, father and Captain Burton may be induced to join us; the others won't, I know."

Peggy Webster, who had been sitting on a pile of Camp Fire sofa cushions, got up immediately.

"Sally, you always were the most sensible one of us and I should enjoy a walk. There were so many hours of sitting still on the train. Besides, I agree with you that we should no longer neglect Dan or Philip Stead or Mr. Hale. Ralph is not here, but I intend to help defend his sex."

Peggy Webster, who was about nineteen years old, was dark and vivid with a brilliant color, full crimson lips, black hair and eyes which of late had grown gentler in their expression. Perhaps the most popular of the younger group of Sunrise Camp Fire girls, Peggy always had been singularly sincere and courageous, besides possessing the vitality which in itself is so magnetic.

To-day, studying Peggy Webster closely, Mary Gilchrist felt a mingled sensation of admiration and envy. There were certain traits of character which she and Peggy held in common, and in a way Gill cherished the hope that she might fill Peggy's place in their Camp Fire now that Peggy was so soon to marry and leave them. Yet there was also a fundamental difference between them that Gill knew ever must stand in her way, unless she were able to conquer it.

"I see no reason for wasting time in teasing Sally. I consider that she has made an extremely agreeable suggestion," Gill protested.

Half an hour later, Peggy Webster, Bettina Graham, Mary Gilchrist, Marguerite Arnot, Sally and Alice Ashton and the small English girl, Chitty, who rarely left Bettina Graham's side when it was possible to be with her, set out, leaving Vera Lagerloff to entertain Juliet Temple, the girl who had come to the cabin so unexpectedly, but concerning whose history an character they had no knowledge.

To Mary Gilchrist's annoyance Allan Drain had joined their three young men

guests, but she need not have troubled. He attached himself to Bettina and Chitty after a polite greeting to her, as soon as they set out on their expedition.

In a walk composed of a large group of people, the arrangement in the beginning is apt to be haphazard, controlled more by chance than choice.

Personally Bettina was glad that Allan Drain seemed interested to walk beside her, since this left David Hale free to be with Marguerite Arnot. Otherwise his sense of duty might have impelled him to be attentive to her. He had come to the cabin at her mother's invitation. Bettina was convinced that he would find more pleasure in Marguerite's company and that they would be glad to talk over the past year in France.

The walk was not to be of great length, Mary Gilchrist having proposed that they go to a low, cleared hill about a mile away on the far side of Half Moon Lake for their first toboggan ride.

One of Miss Patricia's gifts, sent down from Canada, had been a toboggan capable of carrying eight persons. But to the

Camp Fire girls' chagrin Mrs. Burton had been unwilling to have them make use of it until they had a masculine escort. Absurd as her point of view appeared to several of the more independent members of her group of Camp Fire girls, no one had appealed from her decision.

This afternoon, moving swiftly ahead on snow shoes, Mary Gilchrist and Dan Webster dragged the great sleigh, leaving the others to follow as swiftly as possible. No one of the others had acquired Gill's skill in the management of snow shoes save Dan Webster who had been brought up on a New Hampshire farm and was a trained athlete.

"Gill and Dan look very handsome together, don't they?" Alice Ashton remarked. Tall and intellectual and not especially good looking, Alice Ashton was far from possessing her younger sister Sally's popularity with men of all ages. But at present she and Sally were walking with their distant cousin, Philip Stead, between them and, as Sally was not making the faintest effort to entertain him, Alice felt compelled to assume the responsibility.

What was the difficulty with Sally? The suggestion that they go for a walk had been her own, and yet at present she looked as uncomfortable and annoyed as Sally ever permitted herself to appear. Undoubtedly she must be angry or troubled by some recent occurrence. Alice did not consider that this offered a sufficient excuse for Sally's entire lack of interest.

The new cousin, Philip Stead, might have been an inanimate object walking between them.

Sally looked extremely pretty, with more color than usual, due to the sharp cold. She was wearing Mrs. Burton's old seal-skin coat and cap, Aunt Patricia having presented the Camp Fire guardian with handsomer ones at the beginning of the winter in the Adirondacks. And Sally's eyes and hair were nearly of the same shade and softness as the brown furs. Notwithstanding, she was frowning and her lips had a pouting, sullen look like a disappointed child's.

Not appreciating the reason Alice was puzzled and at the same time grateful that the new cousin did not appear disturbed

by Sally's indifference, but sufficiently interested in her to make the task of amusing him simpler than she had imagined possible.

Alice was right. Sally was annoyed, she was even unhappy, although she would scarcely have agreed to this.

During the entire winter at Half Moon Lake had she not been looking forward almost daily to Dan Webster's visit at Christmas time? Since their parting in France she and Dan had written each other occasionally, but neither of them wrote especially well, so that the letters were not very satisfactory.

Well, Dan had arrived and so far they had exchanged exactly eight words, the self-same words, save for the interchange of names: "Hello, Sally, I am glad to see you," and her own reply with no more warmth or originality.

To herself at any rate she could confess that she had proposed a walk in order that she and Dan might have a brief time together without half a dozen or more persons surrounding them. If Dan only had made an effort to walk beside her they might easily have arranged to drop a few paces behind the others.

But Dan had made no such effort and apparently had no such thought. Already he and Mary Gilchrist were speeding on an eighth of a mile ahead, Mary's golden scarf and Dan's blue one, whipped by the wind, were like gay pennants urging the stragglers to follow.

But Sally could not walk rapidly on the icy ground and already was out of breath. Neither had she any interest in the arrival at the summit of the hill, since the thought of the tobogganing terrified her and she had no wish to confess the fact.

Reaching the top of the hill, Sally allowed Bettina Graham, her sister Alice, and Peggy Webster to reveal their Camp Fire prowess by starting a fire from the oily bark of a white birch tree, while Dan Webster, Philip Stead and Mary Gilchrist made the original test of the toboggan slide.

Three-quarters of an hour later, still standing beside the now huge bonfire, Sally never had moved a dozen paces away, and this in spite of repeated invitation from nearly every one of her companions to make the journey down the long, smooth path of ice to the edge of Half Moon Lake.

"Thanks, I don't believe I would care for it. Yes, I am a little afraid, besides I should **not** like the long walk up the hill when the ride is over," she had protested politely but with the firmness the other girls recognized as characteristic.

Dan Webster appeared either to be oblivious to, or else to have forgotten Sally's accustomed obstinacy. Not once but half a dozen times he urged her to take part, insisting that he would take care of her and even bring her back up the hill. Sally continued to shake her head: "Thanks very much, you are awfully kind, but I had rather not," until finally even Dan himself desisted.

Besides Sally Ashton there was one other member of the party who would not be persuaded to attempt the tobogganing—Allan Drain.

Sally had once overheard a conversation between him and Mary Gilchrist, and afterwards the young man had wandered off leaving her to guard the fire alone.

"I suppose you are afraid as Sally is," Gill had said, and Sally, not annoyed in the least by a reference to her cowardice, had

thought Gill never looked handsomer or more vigorous, with her auburn hair blowing from beneath her gray squirrel cap, her cheeks glowing with health and her full lips parted.

In contrast her companion had appeared white and frozen, half lifeless, with all the color gone from his face and his lips blue. Really Gill was not kind, Sally concluded, observing that Allan Drain had to hold himself together to keep from shivering.

"I don't like a man who is a coward. Life must be a great bore to anyone who hates the outdoor world as you do and yet is compelled to be a part of it. I know you prefer a stuffy little room high up over a city with your books and your poetry and your dream of yourself," she protested.

With a little light laughter, Gill disappeared and a short time after Sally observed the young poet start down the hill on the way either to their cabin or his own.

When he had gone too far to hear her call, Sally regretted that she had not accompanied him. In spite of the fire she was growing stiff with the cold. Already the afternoon shadows were turning the white

world about her into softer tones of lilac and gold.

Sorry for her own suggestion, she now longed to be back at Tahawus and with her mother and father, who surely belonged to her after their long talk with the others. Nor did she wish any one to accompany her, which was a part of her mood since ordinarily nothing would have induced her to walk any distance in the winter woods alone.

Fortunately to-day one had not to be so careful of the trail. Here it was straight down the hill they had just climbed together.

There was no one near. Allan Drain was almost out of sight, yet his course would serve as a guide.

The others, crowding the toboggan, were midway down the steep incline.

Placing a fresh pile of wood on the fire and warming herself as thoroughly as possible, a moment later, without confiding her intention, Sally set off alone down the snow-covered mountain, carefully keeping in the tracks made by herself and her friends a short time before.

CHAPTER XIII

ANXIOUS WAITING

THE first few yards of her trip down-hill Sally managed with comparative comfort, but soon after the ice path grew steeper and her footing less secure. Then she would slide for a few feet, catching at any tree or frozen shrub along her route. A quarter of a mile away already she was sorry she had attempted the descent alone.

“Alice! Alice! Dan! Dan!” she called, hoping that some one of her friends had discovered her absence and would come searching for her. But no one answered and no one came. Should she return up the slope, or wait where she was until the others returned? The time could not be long; already they had been away from Tahawus cabin two hours and had promised to return before twilight.

Five minutes of waiting and Sally found herself growing numb from the cold. She had not been exercising, and toasting herself

in front of the open fire evidently had made her more susceptible to the cold. Unquestionably she must move on in one direction or the other, and yet to go back would mean that the return journey would be doubly long. Besides, she wanted to be home. A vision of her mother and father, of the Camp Fire guardian, of their older guests seated about the great fire in the living-room of the cabin assailed her. Anxious they probably were already at the failure of the younger members of the house party to return.

Moving cautiously a few feet further along, Sally's foot struck against a stone concealed by the ice, yet her fall did not appear to have injured her; as she lay quiet she felt more dazed than hurt.

Soon after she was up and on her way again.

But now the snow trail was no longer so plain as it had been and she was therefore obliged to study the route more carefully. However, she concluded that if one kept steadily down the hill toward the valley one could not go far astray and once on level ground walking would be less difficult.

Yet if only she had not suggested this

outdoor excursion, which had proved such a disappointment to her!

From cold, from fatigue and disappointment the slow tears coursing down her cheeks seemed to freeze into tiny crystals. By and by she was so cold that she could not move rapidly, although aware that in action lay her only safeguard.

Another false step and Sally was glad to awaken to the realization that her second fall had brought her further down the hill. In a quarter of a mile more doubtless she would reach the frozen bank of Half Moon Lake and be able to see the lights of their camp on the farther side, for although the lake was of considerable length it was not more than fifty yards wide.

At the foot of the hill Sally found herself in a small ravine, where the ice had formed only a thin layer above the drifting snow. Attempting to cross the ravine she sank to her knees, but managed to flounder out again.

In order to console herself she attempted to recall various Camp Fire maxims which might afford her courage or inspiration, but concluded that concentration upon her task left no opportunity for other ideas.

On the farther side of the ravine which she did not remember to have crossed earlier in the afternoon there was no gleaming surface of water frozen into the winter landscape.

Instantly Sally appreciated that she had lost the trail and had come down the hill at some distant point from Tahawus cabin. Across the lake at any hour of the day or night one could see blue curls of smoke rising from the cabin, or at dusk the lights gleaming from the windows, but now no human habitation was visible.

Sally was in a world of complete loneliness. There is no loneliness, no silence so absolute as the forest in winter. Except for the snow birds, all the other birds have departed. Save when they must seek food, the animals keep their own cloisters; there are no leaves to rustle on the trees, only the little crackling noises due to intense cold.

How far was she at present from Tahawus cabin or any shelter? An instant Sally stood still. Curiously in the face of actual danger she lost her sense of discomfort and disenchantment and with a serious situation possessed an extraordinary capacity for calm judgment.

In an hour the woods would be in darkness. There was no point in evading the issue; she appreciated what was inevitable.

Yet she had no thought of surrender, not for the present.

With the realization of the situation Sally seemed to feel added strength and faith.

When the others arrived at Tahawus cabin, finding that she was not there, a search party would start out at once. If only she had not broken her compass a few days before, as she rarely left home without it, at least she might have managed to walk in the direction of Tahawus cabin and not face the risk of going the opposite way.

Notwithstanding the barricade of hills, she could see toward the west that the sun had descended, leaving a faint afterglow of purple and yellow and rose on the dim white peaks.

Sally moved westward, believing Tahawus cabin lay toward the west. But darkness came at length and she grew more bewildered. Moreover, she was nearly frozen. Now and then she would pause to wave her arms and stamp her feet, smiling at herself meanwhile, a half frozen, childish smile.

In her fur coat with her waving arms, so stiff they moved with difficulty, she must have looked like an animated bear had anyone seen her in the dusk.

Several times Sally stumbled and fell forward, only to pick herself up and go steadfastly on.

She had no fear of wild animals, most of them were vanished from the Adirondack forest; nor of the darkness was she afraid; she was fearful of but two things, the cold and the silence.

Moreover, always before her appeared the picture of the gleaming fireplace at the cabin. Once she put out her hands as if she would warm them before it. Again she felt her father's arms about her and her head dropping half asleep against his shoulder. Then Sally aroused herself more completely, appreciating that drowsiness must be fought above all other sensations, if one would conquer the peril of freezing.

Twice Sally was under the impression that she saw a tall figure approaching and called Dan Webster's name, only to find later that the figure she had hoped might be human was a low tree with a pair of forked arms.



SALLY'S HANDS BEAT AGAINST THE CLOSED DOOR

Toward the latter part of her journeying she had no impressions, almost no consciousness, yet something must have guided her—instinct, sub-conscious mind, call it what you will.

A light drew her, as a light has drawn all wanderers on the face of the earth.

Rising on the peak of a low hill appeared a fairy palace with only the towers visible as if built upon air, but nearer, almost beside her, a small, uncertain light.

Sally's hands beat against the closed door of a small, one-room house.

The face of the man who opened the door she had a faint impression of having seen before, but afterwards she remembered nothing but her own effort to reach the fire and the man restraining her.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTMAS EVE

“**T**HEN you really did care, Dan, when you feared I was lost and that something tragic may have happened?”

“I always intended to find you, Sally.”

Yet Dan Webster looked troubled.

He was standing staring down at the girl who was sitting wrapped in a white woolen cape before the log fire at Tahawus cabin.

Somehow Sally Ashton appeared several years younger than before her adventure. She was paler, the lines of her face thinner and there was a little downward droop to the corners of her full lips.

“And yet in a way I did not find you after all! I was merely tramping through the woods calling your name when by accident I saw a figure moving toward me, the man whose little cabin you had stumbled into. Fate was kinder to you than you dream, Sally. Mr. Holden was on his way to your friends.”

Sally slipped further down into the large semi-invalid chair, ordinarily occupied by Mrs. Burton.

"Yes, and I implored him not to leave me alone, Dan. I know it was selfish of me and yet I wanted to wait till morning before sending any word. I don't remember that I was so frightened when I was wandering around alone. I have not as much imagination as the other girls, besides at first I knew I must not allow myself to be terrified and afterwards, well, afterwards I suppose I really was too cold, Dan, to think or care for anything in the world save getting warm again. Yet I did think of mother and father and you. I don't believe I thought of Alice."

Sally's face wore an odd, childish expression.

"Alice is so critical of me and of course getting lost and nearly freezing was partly my own fault and partly yours, Dan. But what I intended to tell you was that as soon as I recovered a little and had something warm to drink, hot coffee, or tea, and had rested, Mr. Holden—was that his name?—insisted that he must leave me and tramp

to Tahawus cabin. It was miles away and I knew no one could get back before midnight. So suddenly it seemed to me I could not stay alone. Before it had been so silent and now I could hear strange sounds, the barking of little foxes, the calls of animals. I feared no one would return and I would be forever lost in the tiny hut."

Sally shivered.

"Nevertheless Mr. Holden would go. He told me I would be entirely safe and could doubtless sleep until his return. Strange that I should have seen him before! It was one afternoon when Chitty and I were in the woods not far away and he sat listening to Chitty's singing. I was puzzled by him then and am still puzzled. Did you ask him, Dan, why he lived like a hermit? I will some day, and I think he may tell me. Anyhow I am very grateful to him. And I was just falling asleep, Dan, when you came and found me. Then together you dragged me back on a sled. Do you know I have scarcely been wide awake since mother and father lifted me and brought me into the cabin. And yet I am still tired."

Back among a pile of cushions Sally dropped her head as if she were not altogether displeased by her present condition.

Nevertheless, her companion watched her anxiously.

Dan Webster was a tall, splendid looking fellow, six feet in height, with blue eyes, coal-black hair and extraordinary physical vigor. He had been two years with the American army in France, but at present was only twenty-two.

"It is perfectly natural that you should be tired, Sally. I am only worried for fear we are doing too much talking. Your mother told me to keep you amused and away from all the excitement. One question I must ask. What did you mean by saying a few moments ago that I was in part responsible for your attempt to return to the cabin alone and being lost in consequence? Had I dreamed what you intended, I should never have allowed it. It really was nonsensical of you, Sally, to attempt to come home alone; you know you have less skill in outdoor things than the other Camp Fire girls and less courage."

Sally frowned.

"Then all the more reason why you should not have left me alone, first to walk up the hill without even speaking to me and afterwards to stand and freeze while you continued to amuse yourself with Mary Gilchrist. Of course Gill is athletic and has lots of courage and is all the things I am not, but you have always pretended to be my friend, Dan, and I have not seen you since we parted in France. You told me then that I ought to return home because I had less ability to help with reconstruction work than the other Camp Fire girls. It is always the things I lack that you notice, isn't it? But you are right, I am tired and would prefer not to talk any more. To think that to-morrow is not only Christmas but Peggy's wedding day! Little did any of us dream that a white Christmas at Half Moon Lake would see the first wedding among our group of Sunrise Hill Camp Fire girls! If you don't mind, will you leave me alone for a little while now, Dan? No, I don't wish to sleep; there are several things I want to think about. I'll see you to-night at supper."

"I won't go, Sally, until you explain what you meant."

Lowering her eyelids as if intending to rest, Sally glanced at the tall figure towering above her, through half open eyes which afforded her a plain view of her companion, but concealed her expression from him.

There was something in Dan's manner which pleased Sally.

He looked so strong and masterful and yet at the same time so hurt and puzzled. It always had been a comfort and an amusement that she understood him better than he would ever understand her.

"Why, I meant nothing except what I said, Dan."

"But to talk of pretense in my friendship for you, Sally, is so nonsensical. I have cared for you ever since you were a little girl more than I have cared for any one save my own family. Of late, well, I might as well be honest, after I saw you in France I knew I cared more. I did not want to speak of this to you, Sally, not for a time. I feel as if somehow you were too young. I know of course that in France Lieutenant Fleury,* the young officer you nursed, liked you pretty well and then there was some

*See "Camp Fire Girls on the Field of Honor."

Englishman, but they were foreigners and I suppose afraid to take a chance. I can't say I blame them, although I did want you back in your own country for selfish reasons as well as for your own good."

The girl's brown eyes with their curiously golden depth were wide open at this moment.

"I really never could like any one except an American, Dan. I did not dream until I was in Europe how much I cared for my own country."

Dan did not appear as pleased by this speech as might have been expected.

"There are more than a hundred million Americans, Sally, and I presume about ten million young men. Is it your idea that you care for them all alike because they are Americans?"

"Not alike," Sally returned. "But about Mary Gilchrist?"

Dan flushed and looked as if he wished to make an angry retort. Then the sight of Sally sitting warm and safe and sweet before the open fire and the memory of the hours he had tramped the frozen earth hoping and yet dreading to discover her, softened him.

"About Mary Gilchrist you know there is nothing to say, Sally, know it fully as well as I. The other afternoon she needed some one to help with the toboggan. I was accustomed to the sport and fond of it and knew how to run things when the other fellows did not. To have remained with you, which I would prefer to have done, was to have affected everybody's pleasure. If that is the reason why you started home alone, I think you were pretty hard on us all."

To make a confession of a mistake was more difficult for Sally than for a more impetuous temperament, yet she answered with an air of unexpected penitence.

"*I am* sorry, Dan. I was angry and piqued and jealous perhaps. So I suppose I deserved what happened to me, yet it was not fair to make mother and father and Tante and the others and you, Dan, uneasy."

"Uneasy, well that is scarcely the proper word, Sally. I have never been more wretched in my life. I knew if I did not find you and if all was not well with you I should never have another happy moment.

Dan spoke simply but with such complete sincerity that Sally made a little movement and saw his hand reach out as if he wished to touch her soft hair. Then the door opened and Mrs. Burton, the Camp Fire guardian, with her sister, Mrs. Webster, came into the living-room.

They were twin sisters, at one time Polly and Mollie O'Neill, and among the original group of Camp Fire girls.

They had resembled each other in the past, but the years and difference in temperament and experience at present made the likeness less apparent. Mrs. Webster had grown plump, there were lines of gray in her dark hair, her cheeks were bright and freshly colored. She had a look of gentle and dignified maturity. Save for the death of her son, Billy Webster,* her life had been one of happiness and fulfilment, devoted to her husband and her two children, Dan Webster and Peggy, and to her gifted sister, Polly O'Neill Burton, in the brief periods when they were able to be together. In fact, she looked ten years the elder; the other woman's slender figure, her dark hair

*See "Camp Fire Girls at the End of the Trail."

and brilliant eyes, her vividness held no suggestion of age.

“Sally, dear, your mother is asking for you and wants you to lie down for a little while. The truth is I believe she is afraid to have you out of her sight after your behavior the other evening. Dan, will you escort Sally? She seems to require some one to look after her at present, although she was once the Camp Fire heroine. Mollie and I wish to decide upon the arrangements of this room to-morrow. Peggy has left all details to the other Camp Fire girls and Bettina has asked our advice. I suppose the ceremony ought to be performed there between the two big windows with the white world of beauty outside as the background. But really, Mollie, how you can be willing to permit our only and beloved Peggy to be married in this abrupt fashion is beyond my comprehension.

“She came to us here at Tahawus cabin that we might have a brief visit together free from the thought of her marriage to Ralph Merritt in the spring and lo, Ralph, descends upon us and demands Peggy in thirty-six hours! It is too impossible; you and William should not have agreed.”

Mrs. Webster placed her arm about her sister.

"But, Polly, Peggy told you she would not dream of marrying Ralph in this abrupt fashion unless you consented and believed it the thing she should do. Not only are you her adored aunt, but you have been her Camp Fire guardian all these years and I am accustomed to the idea that she loves you, if not better, at least as well as she loves me. Now if you are to make yourself ill over this when you were getting stronger, why Ralph can go to China alone and Peggy wait until he is able to return for her. I shall tell her you have changed your mind and consented only because you did not wish her to be unhappy."

"Well, suppose I did consent for that reason, Mollie, all the more reason why I must *not* change my mind. We can have this room filled with Christmas evergreens and Ralph tells me he has ordered roses and lilies to be sent up from town. Our Peggy shall be 'a white bride of winter' and I promise to pretend that I do not hate all weddings save my own, and above all others the marriage of my Sunrise Camp Fire girls!"

CHAPTER XV

ROMANCE

THE living-room at Tahawus cabin suggested an outdoor cathedral. Evergreens arched overhead; the walls were lined with green branches of holly, cedar and pine; while above the mantel and hanging from the chandelier were bunches of mistletoe, the white berries, like captured snowflakes.

Between the front windows swung a bell composed of mistletoe leaves with the clapper of the white berries. Underneath was an improvised platform with a background of green and stalks of lilies and roses.

Yet the wedding ceremony was to be of the simplest character with no outside guests.

On Peggy's part this involved no especial sacrifice, since nearly every one she cared for deeply was at present in Tahawus cabin, her father having arrived with Ralph Merritt.

Ralph's parents were the cause of the hurried wedding. Spending the winter in China, it had been their intention to return home in the early spring in order to be present at the marriage of their son and Peggy Webster. However, a cable announcing his mother's serious illness, had urged Ralph to sail for China as soon as possible. And he had the good fortune at the last moment to persuade Peggy not to force him to make the long journey alone.

There was no opportunity for the purchase of wedding clothes, but Peggy was to spend several days in New York, where she could outfit herself for the journey.

The wedding was to take place at high noon, with a clergyman from Saranac officiating.

At exactly the moment of high noon, with the clock in the hall chiming twelve strokes, Peggy walked into the living-room on the arm of her father. Her brother, Dan, was best man and he and Ralph stood awaiting her.

Afterwards the Sunrise Camp Fire girls formed a semicircle about the bride, wearing simple toilettes of white serge which had

been intended for the Christmas dinner party.

Peggy's wedding dress was a white crepe de chine without trimming of any kind save an exquisite collar of Duchess lace, which Miss Patricia had unexpectedly produced as a wedding gift. Without a wedding veil Peggy looked as her family and friends were accustomed to seeing her at any time; her color never wavered, her dark eyes remained steadfast and untroubled, in fact she seemed less agitated than any one of the other Camp Fire girls.

Not far away from the little group the Camp Fire guardian stood between her husband and Miss Patricia. Having solemnly promised Peggy not to break down, her lips were firmly closed, her face white with two bright spots of color in her cheeks, yet her blue eyes less brilliant than usual.

Mrs. Webster cried softly during the ceremony, nevertheless, her lips continued to smile while her eyes were dim; her own marriage had proved so satisfying and, devoted to Ralph Merritt, she had the faith to believe that Peggy's would be equally so.

Mary Gilchrist, whose position was at

one of the ends of the semi-circle, toward the close of the ceremony glanced toward the group of people who were slightly more in the background—Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, and Philip Stead with Elspeth and David Murray behind them and David Hale a few feet away.

Beside the great fireplace Mrs. Burton was standing near Allan Drain, who always seemed to prefer her society to any other.

She had on a soft gray chiffon dress over silk. In an irrelevant fashion it occurred to Gill that Mrs. Burton was rather too close to the open fire.

The next instant the impression vanished as her interest in Peggy recurred. Yet the subconscious thought must have remained, for scarcely aware of her action a second time she turned her head to behold a little, light flame flare suddenly amid the folds of the soft material and spread with amazing rapidity.

She was a number of yards away and a movement on her part would interrupt the ceremony, now at its most solemn moment. Besides, Mrs. Burton, or some one near, must know what was occurring before she

could dream of reaching her. Transfixed, she remained staring perhaps not thirty seconds. Then she saw Mrs. Burton utter a little cry that was almost soundless, so promptly was it suppressed. Not wishing to destroy the beauty of the ceremony or to attract attention, unwisely she turned to escape from the room and with her first movement the blaze so increased that she appeared to be standing in a circle of flame.

However, Allan Drain immediately threw his arms about her and was holding her still, while at the same time he was beating out the flames. The following instant David Hale, aware at last of the situation, snatched a heavy shawl from a chair, enfolded Allan Drain and Mrs. Burton inside it.

It was all so quickly and quietly accomplished that Peggy and the other Camp Fire girls had no knowledge of what had taken place until the service was ended.

The others had seen it, and yet for Peggy's sake, as the danger was past, had made no outcry.

"But, Betty, I do not understand how you could have been so careless," Mrs. Burton protested almost irritable from

fright, when Peggy and Ralph had turned and were surrounded by their mother and father, the Camp Fire girls, Dan and Mr. and Mrs. Ashton.

Only Bettina and Mary Gilchrist moved over to the smaller group encircling Mrs. Graham and almost concealing her.

"I am not hurt, Bettina dear, don't be alarmed. And, Polly, it was careless of me, I am sorry to have frightened you. No, I am perfectly all right, only I am afraid Allan Drain is hurt. I am so sorry, Allan, I seem to be your evil genius. Bettina, suppose you come with us and please don't let any one else trouble; I would so regret disturbing Peggy's and Ralph's wedding. We will come back in a few moments."

So the little group disappeared, accompanied by David Hale and Mary Gilchrist, who followed after them to offer assistance.

A quarter of an hour later they all returned to the living-room save Allan Drain. Mrs. Burton, having changed her dress, showed no trace of her recent peril and begged that there be no discussion of it.

Peggy and Ralph were to remain for Christmas dinner at two o'clock and afterwards to leave for New York.

The dinner was the usual Christmas feast, but because Miss Patricia was hostess, she had ordered from the great city beautiful favors and bonbons as well, the principal favor a tiny log cabin with a small camp fire glowing outside upon a little surface of crystal to represent the frozen earth.

Before four Peggy and Ralph departed, driven to Saranac by David Murray and soon after a slight atmosphere of depression descended upon Tahawus cabin.

The older members of the house party departed to their own rooms, including Bettina Graham who felt Peggy's marriage more keenly than the other Camp Fire girls, besides being worried over the possible nervous shock to her mother from the catastrophe of a few hours before.

The Camp Fire guardian was about to drop down on her couch to rest, and Captain Burton sat reading by the fire, when a knock at the door of her bed-room, which Mrs. Burton opened, admitted Miss Patricia Lord.

"I came in for a moment to find out how you have borne the day's excitement," she began in a tone of unexpected gentleness. "You look rather better than I anticipated."

Mrs. Burton put her arm about the angular figure and drew her down on the couch beside her.

“What does it feel like to be a Christmas fairy godmother, Aunt Patricia—unlike being a fairy godmother during the remainder of the year. But you look tired yourself, dear, or if not tired something is the matter. What is it?”

Miss Patricia’s expression was unusual, a little shamefaced and appealing, altogether unlike her ordinary air of command.

“I want you to do me a favor, Polly. I came in to ask you and Richard when I hoped to discover you alone. I have wished to find you some little Christmas offering, but could not be sure of what you might desire, besides being shut off up here. So I thought perhaps you might get what you wish and so keep me from making a mistake.”

Flushing, and not glancing toward Mrs. Burton, Miss Patricia thrust into her hand a small slip of paper, and when her eyes fell upon it she discovered it to be a check for a thousand dollars.

“This is merely a small Christmas gift,

Polly, which I trust you will not speak of," Miss Patricia announced in her more familiar tone of severity before the younger woman had an opportunity to respond.

"Richard," Mrs. Burton said finally, her voice a little uncertain, "Aunt Patricia has just given us a check for a thousand dollars, which of course we cannot accept, chiefly because she is the most generous person in the world, and if she is permitted to go on in this fashion some day will have no money at all. Dear, you know I am everlastingly grateful and that Richard and I already owe you more than we would be willing to accept from any one else, but really we cannot take this as well. There is your home in France for war orphans which must absorb a portion of your capital and then the expense of this cabin and all you have done for me and the girls this winter. You know how deeply I appreciate the added gift, dear, but you must try and see that it is out of the question for Richard and me to be under further obligation."

"Obligation!" Miss Patricia repeated. Were you my own daughter, Polly—and a dozen times I have told you that I am as

much attached to you as if you were—would you treat my gift in this fashion?"

"Why, yes, dear, I think so. Please do not be hurt, I have told you Richard and I could not accept gifts of money from you."

Leaning over, Miss Patricia took the check from the younger woman's hand, tossing it into the fire.

"I presume you agree with Polly, Richard, since you have made no remark," she added. Then, notwithstanding their protests and effort at persuasion, she arose and stalked out of the room.

"You have wounded Aunt Patricia very deeply, I am afraid, Polly," Captain Burton said the next moment. "However, I suppose you were right and that it was unavoidable."

Mrs. Burton had flung herself down on her couch.

"Of course I was right, Richard, and you need not have placed the entire responsibility of the refusal upon me. Do you suppose I enjoy wounding Aunt Patricia any more than you do? Was there ever any one so dear and so difficult? She will not forgive me in many a day! The truth is,

Richard, Aunt Patricia has conceived the idea that you are worried over some money difficulty and would like to give us a good deal more money if we should need it. Can she by any chance be right?"

Rising, Captain Burton walked over to the fireplace and stood looking into the fire.

"Yes, Polly, Aunt Patricia is never altogether mistaken. One can trust always to her wisdom and kindness. We have some investments which of late have not been turning out so well as I hoped. Yet at present there is no occasion to be troubled; after a little they will adjust themselves. I beg of you not to worry or in any way to allow the idea to interfere with your recovery."

"You are telling me the truth, Richard? I object to being treated like a child or an invalid when I am neither. I am ever so much better and there is no reason now why I should not be allowed to return to work. In a year I feel convinced I could again be fairly successful."

"Please do not refer to the subject, Polly. Before I should agree to such rashness I would appeal to Aunt Patricia. However, there is no necessity."

"But you promise to let me know if there should be a necessity."

At first Captain Burton made no reply and then said smiling:

"Polly, there are times when I agree with Aunt Patricia, that you are a trying person. I presume I shall be forced to tell you, but there will be no occasion."

During this discussion the living-room of Tahawus cabin was gradually being deserted.

Dan Webster, David Hale, Philip Stead with Alice Ashton, Marguerite Arnot and Vera Lagerloff had departed for an hour's walk, the other girls having declined for various reasons. Alone before the fire with an open book, Allan Drain was trying to amuse himself and to forget the pain whose existence he steadfastly had been denying. There was nothing serious the matter, save that his hands had been burned, and, in spite of the cooling bandages in which they were wrapped, continued to ache.

With difficulty he could turn the pages of his book, so that he immediately heard the rustle of a soft silk gown and glanced up to find Mrs. Graham beside him. She had taken off her more formal dress and was wearing a light blue tea gown.

“I came in to ask if there was anything I could do for you, Allan? I am afraid you are pretty uncomfortable in spite of your denial of the fact. I have been wishing there was some way in which I could make up to you for the loss of your verses, but instead I am more than ever under obligation. I don’t intend to allow myself to think of what might have happened this morning except for your presence of mind and courage. What are you reading?”

“A volume of new plays, some one seems to have sent Mrs. Burton. I did nothing for you this morning; it was David Hale who really rescued us both, Mrs. Graham. Yet there is something you can do for me. I wonder if I am asking too much? Could you, would you ask Mrs. Burton to glance over a one-act play I lately have been struggling to write? A single word, or suggestion from her would be the greatest help and inspiration to me, more than you can dream. It is not that I think my little play is worth anything, yet if she only considers the idea worth while, why, some day I may be able to do something with it.”

“Why, of course Polly shall read your

play and give you her criticism, although I warn you, she may not be flattering. Doubtless she would have read it had you asked her yourself. She certainly will now that I shall allow her no peace of mind until the fact is accomplished. You are going to stay with us a few days until you have recovered, but Bettina will walk over to your cabin with you to-morrow and bring back your manuscript. We shall see this manuscript does not come to grief. Good-by, go back to your reading, I'll not interrupt you any further."

But Allan Drain did not return to his reading; instead he allowed the leaves of his book to close while he sat gazing into the fire. He had been afraid he would not have sufficient courage for the request he had just made, but now having gone through the ordeal he wondered whether or not he regretted his own act. Doubtless the little play was no good and Mrs. Burton would be tired and bored by being forced to devote a half hour to it. Moreover, she was too sincere an artist not to give him her true opinion, and afterwards he would never have the steadfastness to go on with his

writing, knowing her estimate of his work. This winter was going to be difficult enough, so why not better have kept this dream at least until the spring, when he need not be so much indoors?

On this occasion Allan Drain did not hear the door open, nor glance up until Mary Gilchrist stood beside him.

“I met Mrs. Burton in the hall and she suggested that I come in and offer to read to you if you will allow me. She said you were having some trouble in trying to turn over the pages of your book. I do not read very well, but it would give me a great deal of pleasure if you will let me make the attempt. Then if you can’t bear my effort, why I’ll stop and not be in the least offended.”

Gill’s manner was so friendly and had in it such a new atmosphere of shyness, almost of apology, that Allan Drain, although not anxious to have his reverie interrupted, did not like to decline.

“Perhaps it would be pleasanter to talk; I can read at any time, as I am so much alone.”

Declining a chair, Gill dropped down on the floor before the fire.

“Will you talk to me? I should like it ever so much better. There is something I want specially to say to you—I want to apologize for my bad manners ever since our original meeting. You see, you said something then which annoyed me and afterwards impulsively I did something for which I never have forgiven myself, so ever since I have in a way wished to believe you responsible. I thought you had no courage, because you are not the kind of man——”

Hesitating, Gill flushed hotly. How hopelessly stupid and awkward she was! Actually she was about to say the very thing she intended not!”

“Because I am not the kind of fellow you admire. Go on, Miss Gilchrist. You don’t suppose I have any illusions on the subject, do you?”

“Well, yes—no,” Gill answered. “Only to-day I discovered that you possessed both courage and presence of mind, the very traits of character I *do* admire. Besides, at this moment I appreciate you are in lots of pain, your face shows it, and yet you would rather not have me mention the fact.

“I wish you would help me about some-



“I WISH YOU WOULD HELP ME ABOUT SOMETHING,” SHE SAID.

thing," she went on. "The truth is, I seem to possess no moral courage, and somehow I feel that you do. I have been guilty of a fault that I am ashamed and afraid to confess. It has troubled me for weeks and I have been a good deal more unhappy than any one has realized. I really have wronged you more than any one else, and this morning while Peggy Webster was being married I decided I must confess to some one and that perhaps I had best confess directly to you."

"But I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about," Allan Drain protested.

"No, of course not," Gill answered.

She had thrown back her head so that her face was slightly upturned. The light was on her red-brown hair, leaving her face in shadow. Yet Allan Drain observed that the gallant half boyish expression which she ordinarily wore had vanished and that her square, too determined chin was trembling.

"Let me tell you quickly and please don't interrupt, else I might not be able to go on. I have done you the greatest injustice, and not only you, but Mrs. Graham and Bettina, whom I like so much and whose good opinion I would give a great deal to possess.

“You remember when you brought your collection of verses here for Mrs. Graham to read and she told you afterwards that she had placed them upon a table in her bed-room, and then, after being away for a few hours, on her return discovered they had vanished?”

“I am not likely to forget.”

“Well, I went into Mrs. Graham’s bedroom while she was away and saw the verses lying among some books and papers. As I was curious and wished to read them, although I thought they would be poor, I took them to my own room. I had no opportunity to read them then, as I went for a walk soon afterwards.”

His eyes alight, Allan Drain leaned forward.

“You have them and will return them to me! I appreciate they are no good, just the same they mean a great deal to me. You would not be so unkind as to keep them when they are of no value to you.”

Gill shook her head.

“No, the trouble is I have *not* the verses. You see, you see, I destroyed them. Please, please don’t believe I intended this, it was

wholly an accident, and yet so dreadfully stupid perhaps you can scarcely believe me.

"Not wishing the other girls to know I was sufficiently interested to have borrowed the poems, I hid your manuscripts in an old box with some papers of no value. Then, this is the incredible thing, I forgot they were there. It was only a moment of forgetfulness; I remembered when it was too late. Later in the same afternoon I decided suddenly to clear out my bureau drawer and so piled all the trash I could find into this self-same box and carried it into our study and flung the box and everything it contained into the fire. The instant the papers caught fire I knew what I had done. I did thrust my hands into the flames only to draw forth a few charred scraps without a single line upon them."

Gill drew up her sleeve; the scar from a burn showed above her wrist.

"See I burned my arm in the attempt," she murmured indifferently, "not that I cared except that I have had trouble in hiding the burn from the other girls. The worst thing I have done was not so much the accident and my foolish loss of memory,

but the fact that when Mrs. Graham and Bettina asked if I had seen the manuscripts of your poems, I told them no, or at least I deliberately gave them this impression. Yet all the days of my life I have esteemed truthfulness and a sense of honor the greatest of all human possessions. This is why I have never been able to make the confession. I could not pass through Christmas day without telling you and to-morrow I shall speak to Mrs. Burton, Mrs. Graham, and Bettina and let them know of what I have been guilty. Afterwards I shall go home, I cannot remain here at Tahawus cabin.

“Nor can I say that I forgive you, Miss Gilchrist. If I should say so I would not be telling the truth. I’ll do my best to forget after a time. After all, I had given up any idea of my verses being restored, so I am not much worse off.”

Gill arose.

“I much prefer your not pretending to forgive me, because you could not mean it truthfully. After I leave Half Moon Lake I hope we may never see each other again. I cannot exactly explain, but I felt when I

met you that you would have an unfortunate influence upon me. Now I can never see you without recalling that because of you, or through you, I have done what I never could have believed of myself."

"I am sorry," Allan Drain responded stiffly.

"So am I, but that makes no real difference now. I hear the others returning. Good-by."

CHAPTER XVI

AN ENCOUNTER

WHILE Gill and Allan Drain were having their interview in the living-room, Bettina Graham slipped out of Tahawus cabin alone and carrying her skates walked down to the edge of Half Moon Lake.

She had been depressed all day; Peggy's marriage and departure to a foreign country meant more to her than most persons dreamed. They had been intimate and devoted friends since they were tiny girls, and Bettina believed their friendship could never again have its old value.

The fact that Peggy appeared to have found her place in the scheme of things also affected Bettina, because of late she herself had felt that she must find some more definite outlet for her own life. Her school days were over unless she were to choose some special course of study; this winter in the mountains, delightful as it had been in

many respects and not without its useful lessons, nevertheless seemed to be a pause and not a step forward in any particular direction.

Unwilling to confess either to her mother or Camp Fire guardian who would be wounded by the knowledge, Bettina had been far more restless and dissatisfied for the past few months than any one had imagined. This afternoon her restlessness had culminated.

Kneeling down, she fastened on her skates.

Twilight was approaching, the distant snow-covered hills were amazing studies in purple, from pale violet to the deeper tones. The surface of the lake itself bore the reflections of a crystal ball.

Bettina started skating slowly, wishing to pursue her own train of thought. She knew what her mother expected of her; they had been discussing the subject this afternoon, and Bettina not only recognized the reasonableness of her mother's position, but would have been hurt had she felt otherwise.

Naturally after two years of absence

abroad, her father and mother looked forward to her returning to Washington and entering society. She was no longer young enough to plead for more time, the war was past and she had been allowed to devote herself to its service. This winter in the Adirondacks was due to a special set of circumstances, her Camp Fire guardian's illness, her father's long absence from Washington, and her mother's desire to be with Mrs. Burton and her group of Camp Fire girls. In another six weeks her mother probably would join her father in the west and conclude the trip with him. She would then go back to Washington and they were looking forward to a happy summer together in their own cottage by the Blue Lagoon. So far Bettina knew nothing save happiness in the prospect before her, but after the summer, her mother had been planning this very afternoon a brilliant winter in Washington society.

Why could she not feel the interest that any other normal girl in the world would feel in such a future, with a successful marriage as its climax?

Yet Bettina knew she only dreaded it

with an even deeper antagonism than she had felt in the past.

If only she and her brother, Tony, might have changed places? Tony was as strikingly handsome as their mother was beautiful and possessed her social grace and charm of manner.

Bettina believed she had neither; it was not merely a matter of appearance; there were persons who thought her reasonably good looking in her own fashion. Besides, she and her Camp Fire guardian had discussed the subject many times, and she herself had witnessed in Mrs. Burton a triumph of personality which always transcends mere physical beauty. Her own distaste was a far more important factor. In the midst of a group of society people Bettina knew she always was obliged to fight a sense of awkwardness, of shyness, and that she had no conversation and no animation. She could only prove a disappointment to her mother, and yet was it not fair that she should make the experiment? Against her own judgment and desire, her mother had allowed her the past two years of freedom in her Camp Fire life.

Bettina was skating more rapidly than at first, and without her knowledge her depression was fading. The cold air stung her cheeks, but her blood flowed warmly; this portion of the lake was smooth as glass. Finally a smile appeared at the corners of her lips. Perhaps she was taking herself and her own future too seriously, as this was one of the faults of her character. Moreover, doubtless she was spoiled. Never had she to contend against real difficulties such as many other girls face. Marguerite Arnot, for instance, friendless and often-times ill, for years had been forced to earn her own living.

If at this instant Bettina could only have beheld herself with other eyes she would have appreciated her own good fortune more keenly.

Her skating costume was of the color she most affected, a soft, deep-toned blue serge, neither light nor dark blue, with a short skirt and coat. About her throat she was wearing a beaver fur and on her head a cap of beaver nearly the shade of her own hair, one of her mother's Christmas gifts, and carrying a small muff.

Her complexion, at times too pale, was now a lovely combination of white and rose. Tall and slender, Bettina was always exceptionally graceful, but more conspicuous than any other characteristic was her air of high breeding.

"Are you a part of the wind? Won't you please pause and wait for a fellow mortal who has not your swift skill?" Bettina heard a voice behind her calling, and turning skated slowly back.

"But I thought you were off for a walk, Mr. Hale; the cabin was nearly deserted when I escaped?"

"Yes, I was, Miss Bettina, but our walk was over a half hour ago and I inquired of your mother what had become of you. I have been following you for the past fifteen minutes. You observe that I skate abominably and yet I was determined to catch up."

Bettina extended her hand.

"You are a bit out of practice; perhaps if you take my hand I can be of some assistance. It was kind of you to care to join me."

A moment they skated along in silence, David Hale gaining in prowess from the touch of the gloved fingers.

"Does it occur to you, Miss Bettina, this is the first opportunity I have had to exchange a word with you alone?"

Bettina laughed.

"Yes, I know, but you only arrived a short time ago and we have been having a pretty strenuous existence at Tahawus cabin for these last two days. I hope you have not been bored by being forced to be a guest at a wedding, which was as unexpected to us as to you. I want to thank you for your presence of mind this morning. Mother and Mr. Drain would have been more seriously injured except for you."

"I was a dunce, Miss Bettina, not to have discovered sooner what was taking place almost beside me. I suppose I was too interested in the wedding ceremony. But in any case all the danger and therefore all the credit is due Allan Drain. I confess I am a little envious of his position as hero and my own as anything else. I would give a good deal to have you and your mother grateful to me. You seem altogether to have forgotten our friendship. Oh, I do not mean you are not friendly, but I believed we were more than ordinarily friendly dur-

ing the months in France. I hoped when we met again that we might take things up where we left off on that enchanting afternoon in the Queen's secret garden at Versailles. Now I see I must begin again at the beginning, but I am a persistent person and am looking forward to your return to Washington. Then you will be meeting so many people and no doubt will be a great belle, so I am afraid my opportunities for seeing you there will be limited."

Bettina moved so slowly that the two skaters appeared to be poised like birds about to take wing for further flight.

"If I am forced to make my *début* in Washington next winter if you *will* be good to me I shall be more grateful than you realize. I know I shall be a dismal failure. Really I don't mind for myself so much as for my mother; I am afraid she is going to be dreadfully disappointed in me, and she always has been in a fashion. It is hard when people love each other a great deal and yet have no congeniality of taste."

"Then why not follow your friend Peggy Webster's example and so escape the society adventure altogether?"

Bettina shook her head.

"Thanks, I don't like to quote tiresome old axioms, but one has heard of the frying pan and the fire. Besides, one cannot follow Peggy's example all alone. By the way, did you and Marguerite Arnot manage to have your walk together? I hope so. Isn't Marguerite charming? I envy her exquisite manners. You know she is coming to spend next winter with us in Washington; mother has persuaded her. Sometimes I think it might be well if some witch or fairy should force Marguerite and me to change places. She could fill my place so much more gracefully, however, than I could her's."

"You could never change places in my estimation.

Bettina laughed.

"No, I never anticipated such an honor. But come let us go back to the cabin, the darkness is nearly upon us. Isn't the evening exquisite? See the little half moon rising there above our lake! I am sorry, but I cannot stay out longer, I promised I would not. It has been nice to have this little talk with you."

CHAPTER XVII

CLOSED IN

THE week following the end of the Christmas holidays, Mary Gilchrist said good-by to her Camp Fire group and returned home.

She had made her confession to Mrs. Graham, to the Camp Fire guardian and to the girls themselves. If they were surprised or disappointed, the decision to leave Tahawus cabin was Gill's own.

No one precisely understood the situation. Save for Peggy Webster, Gill had appeared the frankest and most straightforward of their number. The accident to the manuscript was unavoidable, her refusal to confess the accident, her evasion of the truth as little like Gill as any one could imagine.

Nor could Gill explain even to herself her unexpected deceit and cowardice. She was more astonished, more disappointed in her own character than any one else.

Her talk with her Camp Fire guardian upon this subject she felt she would always remember.

"My dear, of course I am grieved and in a way angry. You have forced Mrs. Graham, whom I love better than most persons, to bear a sense of guilt and a burden of responsibility that was your's and not her own. I have seldom seen Betty more worried and it has affected the pleasure of her winter with me which I desired to be especially happy. Yet the fact that you have committed the very fault you believed most foreign to you is not so unusual as you consider it, Gill dear. Life has a fashion of tricking us in our preconceived notions of ourselves. She has done the same thing to me and it is one of her bitterest lessons. Of course one has only to try to see that she does not succeed again. I wish you did not feel you were forced to leave the Camp Fire because of your fault. If membership in the Camp Fire demanded perfection I am afraid our number would not be large. You know it only demands an ideal and the effort of getting up and going on after a mistake or a downfall which brings one nearer the ultimate goal."

Gill had been silent for a few moments afterwards, seated on the floor beside her Camp Fire guardian in her bed-room.

"Nevertheless, I think it would be best for me to return home," she said finally, "although the girls also have been kind enough to urge me to remain. Beside my own feeling that I have in a measure betrayed the trust of the Camp Fire, of late I have received several letters from my father telling me that he was lonely and needed me. I have been too long away, but some day perhaps I shall be able to return and once more be a member of the Sunrise Camp Fire. Until then I hope you will not forget me."

So early in the new year Gill vanished from the household at Half Moon Lake and a month later Mrs. Graham departed. Afterwards the winter closed in about Tahawus cabin.

The thermometer fell to ten, then twenty, then thirty degrees below zero. Very rarely now did the snow ever fall, only the ice packed thicker and deeper, the limbs of the trees laden with winter's burdens now and then breaking, fell stiffly to the earth. The

wind rarely blew with any fierceness and the cold was extraordinarily still.

Actually the household felt the coldness less than any one of them anticipated. Rarely a day passed by but the greater number of them were out walking or skating or skiing. Frequently David Murray or one of the girls drove the sleigh to Saranac for provisions and mail. And as she grew stronger, Mrs. Burton was able to accompany them on their shorter excursions.

Nevertheless, it was the long evenings at Half Moon Lake that the Sunrise Camp Fire ever hereafter was to recall as adding a peculiar value and interest to their winter in the Adirondacks.

The darkness fell between half-past four and five o'clock, by six the final afterglow had departed from the crown of hills, and above them hung the stars or the pale winter moon.

Inside Tahawus cabin at this hour there was added warmth and cheerfulness. More logs were piled on the open fires, David Murray heaped the furnace with a fresh supply of coal, lamps were lighted and one by one the girls, their daily tasks accomplished, wandered into the big living-room.

Elspeth had continued to live with them, utterly declining to return to the loneliness and lack of comfort in her brother's bachelor establishment. Owing to her presence the daily program had been changed.

Afternoon tea was no longer a feature of the day, but instead, as Elspeth expressed it, high tea was served at six o'clock. This was a custom among Scotch and English country people and admirably suited to the girls at present, since it afforded them long, uninterrupted evenings, when they were able to read, write letters, sew, or play games, or entertain themselves in a variety of fashions.

But by and by, without a prearranged plan, one entertainment began to be appreciated beyond all others. From eight o'clock until her early bed-time Mrs. Burton read aloud, at first an occasional short story, then as this did not seem to tire her, one or two plays that were her especial favorites.

There were several new plays of unusual quality that were among the New York winter successes. Mrs. Burton sent for these, hoping not to become altogether out of touch with the public taste.

Occasionally the beauty of a few poetic lines or the dramatic value of a situation caused her to forget the character of her little audience. Then her voice and manner revealed the old enchanting quality which had made her famous.

On these occasions Allan Drain, who trudged over every evening when it was possible, oftentimes spending the night in the smallest of the cabins which held no other occupants, used to sit with his head bent seeing and hearing nothing save the magic beauty of the voice able by a swift change of tone to call forth tears or laughter.

Mrs. Burton had read his play and had not thought it altogether bad; had even made suggestions so that he was re-writing it for the third time.

The Camp Fire girls were accustomed to their guardian's gift and therefore accepted it in a more matter-of-fact fashion, although Bettina Graham and Alice Ashton were both aware that she was showing added power, and understood her impatience to return to her profession.

One other person besides Allan Drain appeared to be completely under the spell

of Mrs. Burton's art, but apparently she responded to no one else. Since her unexpected arrival at Tahawus cabin, Juliet Temple had made no effort to make friends with any member of the Camp Fire, nor showed any interest in their attempts toward including her as one of their circle.

She was courteous but plainly cared for no one save Mrs. Burton, whose every wish she seemed able to anticipate and fulfil. Devoted as they were to their guardian, the other girls had been entirely free from any spirit of hero worship, so that Juliet Temple's attitude became annoying.

To Miss Patricia it was more than annoying; her disfavor increased daily. Yet whatever story Juliet Temple had confided to the Camp Fire guardian must have aroused her sympathy. Mrs. Burton insisted Juliet was not to leave Tahawus cabin until she had secured surroundings in which she could be content. And pleased with her present environment apparently, Juliet Temple made no especial effort to discover any other abiding place, notwithstanding Miss Patricia's open hostility.

Moreover, there was no disputing the

obvious fact that she was useful to Mrs. Burton, although the Camp Fire girls agreed with Miss Patricia in not particularly liking or trusting the latest member of their household, and there was no thought of inviting her to become one of the Sunrise Camp Fire. So, perhaps for this reason, as well as her personal devotion, Mrs. Burton behaved toward the newcomer with especial kindness.

Now and then sitting a little apart from the group and fiercely engaged with her knitting, Miss Patricia, after listening to the reading aloud for half an hour or more, would glance from Mrs. Burton to the girl who managed always to be nearer to her than any one else, and observing the expression on the usually colorless and listless face, would rise abruptly and stalk out of the room. Occasionally Mrs. Burton would follow her, but never was Miss Patricia persuaded to return.

CHAPTER XVIII

SPRING

EARLY spring had arrived in the Adirondack forests. Little pools of water lay in patches amid the snow where the sun's rays shone with especial warmth; down the sides of the mountains one could hear the sounds of brooks released from the winter fastness. Thin cakes of ice still were floating on the surface of Half Moon Lake, yet in the open spaces of clear water one could see the reflection of the spruce trees which all winter had stood sentinel.

Now and then a water fowl appeared and stopped to drink, and from deeper in the woods occasionally there was a bird call, poignant and sweet, and the barking of young foxes at night, the beavers, having come forth from their seclusion, were again at work on new dams to meet the spring freshets.

On the veranda in front of Tahawus cabin

Sally Ashton in a golden brown sweater and tam-o-shanter was sweeping away light patches of snow. Standing in the open doorway Alice Ashton and Bettina Graham were talking to their Camp Fire guardian, who was walking rapidly up and down.

“I don’t see why such a display of energy, Tante, unless you are trying to keep warm. Isn’t it a heavenly day?”

Mrs. Burton nodded and laughed.

“I am trying to reduce my weight, Princess, after so indolent a winter. But it is wonderful to be alive on a day like this and to feel so extraordinarily well!”

The Camp Fire guardian walked to the centre of the veranda and paused for a moment, looking out at the landscape. The sun appeared to be shining with a strange brightness as if it also was feeling the year’s new birth. The sky was radiantly blue.

At this moment there was a faint noise of a pony’s hoofs striking against the stones in the road and the next the Camp Fire pony, hitched to a small wagon, appeared in a turn of the road about an eighth of a mile away.

“I’ll race you to see who gets the mail

first," Mrs. Burton called, and slipped off the porch, running swiftly and lightly over the damp earth, the three girls in pursuit.

"Here, David Murray, please give the letters to me, I've won," she demanded, slightly out of breath and holding up her hands for the bag of mail, David having drawn rein to watch the contest.

"Yes, but of all the unfair races, this is the climax!" Alice protested, "seeing that you got away before the rest of us knew what you intended."

"Perhaps, Alice, but considering my age and infirmities, I think I should have been allowed a slight advantage."

"Your age and infirmities are not particularly apparent at this instant, Polly," Miss Patricia announced drily from her seat in the wagon where she and Vera Lagerloff were enthroned surrounded by parcels, "but your lack of dignity undoubtedly is. Do go to your room and do something to your hair; this March wind has blown you to pieces."

If Miss Patricia's tone was severe, her satisfaction was none the less visible. Moreover, at this same instant her own strange,

little gray felt hat, which she affected beyond all others, perhaps under the impression that it was suited to her present informal mode of life, had been tipped to one side, giving her the eccentric appearance to which her companions were accustomed.

"Very well, Aunt Patricia, I am 'yours obediently,' as the old-fashioned letter writers advise. Anyhow, I believe that is the form of signature you like best from me."

Mrs. Burton, slipping her arms through Bettina Graham's and Alice's, started back toward the cabin, Sally climbing into the wagon beside David Murray, since she objected to all unnecessary exertion.

"I wonder had I been so autocratic as a Camp Fire guardian as Aunt Patricia has been with me if I should have met with equal success?" Mrs. Burton inquired laughingly.

Alice Ashton shook her head.

"Oh, I don't know, perhaps so. You see, I have an idea that you are fairly apt to do what you wish in important matters, Tante, even if you do concede the smaller ones."

Mrs. Burton wrinkled her forehead.

"Do you mean my keeping Juliet Temple here with us this winter when neither you girls nor Aunt Patricia like her? There have been reasons I have not been able to explain; besides, Juliet has been very kind and useful to me."

Alice Ashton shrugged her shoulders.

"No, I was not thinking of Juliet Temple or any particular case, but she will serve as an example if you like." Alice appeared entirely undisturbed, although her Camp Fire guardian flushed and looked wounded. Alice was not sensitive and had a fashion of saying what seemed to her the truth without any especial regard for consequences.

"Besides, we should all have been glad to have done for you whatever Juliet Temple has done," Bettina added.

"But, my dear girls, you were busy with your own work and studies and I did not feel I had the right to interrupt you nor to allow Aunt Patricia to exhaust herself utterly."

The subject was not an altogether happy one, so there was no further reference to it. A little later Mrs. Burton in the hall of the cabin was distributing the morning mail.

Five minutes after she vanished to her own bed-room carrying half a dozen letters.

The one from her husband she read immediately, and then without glancing at the others began walking up and down her room, her buoyancy of a short time before departed.

By and by she came back to a table where she had thrown the other letters, and picking them up studied the outside of the envelopes with an abstracted air, as if her mind were not intent upon her occupation. Then she tore open a second letter, reading it carelessly at first and afterwards with closer attention.

She began walking a second time, with a change of manner and as if she were thinking deeply. Her straight brows became a fairly level line, her blue eyes perceptibly darkened, her lips closed more firmly than usual.

At noon there was a knock at her door and Juliet Temple entered.

“Please say that I am not coming in to lunch, Juliet, and bring me something to eat here. If possible, as I expect to be busy, I’d rather not be disturbed this afternoon.”

Mrs. Burton had but scant hope of Miss Patricia's observing her wish and yet the entire afternoon passed and no one came near her.

Nevertheless, she did not appear to be seriously occupied during the earlier part of the afternoon. Instead she sat for an hour before her fire with her hands tightly clasped. Afterwards, drawing her writing table toward her, she wrote a short note which she placed in an envelope and addressed to her husband. The second note was longer and oddly enough addressed to Miss Patricia Lord, who at present moment was not many yards away. But this letter Mrs. Burton placed inside her bureau drawer, and then fell to packing a small suitcase which she afterwards hid away in a closet.

She went in to supper and sat talking an hour or more in the living-room with the Camp Fire girls, but asked to be excused early in the evening and again retired to her own bed-room. She was undressing to put on a tea-gown when the door opened and in walked Miss Patricia looking uncommonly severe.

“I came in to inquire if you are ill, Polly,

or if there is any particular reason why you have avoided our society all day? Really you are one of the most unreasonable people in the world!"

An instant Mrs. Burton hesitated, her expression a little wistful, with almost a childish appeal. Then conscious of Miss Patricia's unrelenting air, and knowing her inflexible will, she shook her head.

"No, Aunt Patricia, I am not in the least ill, in fact I rarely have felt better. But I have had some business I wished to attend to this afternoon and found it more convenient to be alone."

Afterwards, when Miss Patricia, having responded coldly to her good-night, had departed, Mrs. Burton laughed and frowned.

"I am planning to behave like a child. Actually I don't believe one of my Camp Fire girls would be so absurd, but fortunately for me I have never pretended to be a model. The truth is I simply have not the strength of character to oppose Aunt Patricia until I am more definite in my plans. But how I shall ever escape to New York City to-morrow without being found out is beyond my knowledge at present. I

simply must hope for some unexpected good fortune."

The next morning Mrs. Burton, suddenly having concluded that she had best have Juliet Temple accompany her upon her unexpected journey, explaining that she wished to drive to Saranac, she and Juliet, Sally Ashton and David Murray, started forth, the small suitcase concealed beneath the lap robe.

In choosing Sally Ashton for a measure of confidence, Mrs. Burton appreciated that one could always rely upon Sally's perfectly matter-of-fact point of view and her openly expressed conviction that every human being possessed a right to their own choice of life.

"Sally, I want you to do me a great favor," Mrs. Burton explained when they were almost in sight of the town. "When you return to the cabin will you look in my bureau drawer, where you will find a letter addressed to Aunt Patricia? Will you give it to her at once? No, I am not going back with you, I hope to be at home again by day after to-morrow. I am on my way to New York for a few days. I don't know whether Aunt Patricia will reveal the fact

to you and it may be unnecessary, but I yesterday received a letter from an old friend asking me to talk over with him the possibility of my appearing in a new play in the early autumn. I am extremely well and anxious to return to my work as you girls know. Only, as I appreciate that Aunt Patricia will not consent I wish to be more sure myself before I discuss the situation with her. I presume I am behaving very badly, Sally dear, and have the grace to be ashamed of myself."

In response Sally dimpled and nodded.

"Yes, I suppose you are, nevertheless I think you are sensible. After an argument with Aunt Patricia you would have little strength left to discuss business affairs in New York, and besides you probably would have to run away in the end in any case. I'll present your letter, although I do think you are asking a good deal of me."

"Sally, you are a joy forever!" the Camp Fire guardian returned.

Two days later after dusk, when the girls and Miss Patricia had finished supper and were in the living-room, an automobile drew up before Tahawus cabin. Five minutes

after, Mrs. Burton stood in the center of the circle of girls, who were helping her remove her wraps.

Save for a curt nod of her head, Miss Patricia Lord gave no further sign of being aware of her presence.

A little later, as Mrs. Burton approached her, she drew back.

"Please tell us at once what decision you have reached, Polly. Do you intend to disregard your responsibility as a Camp Fire guardian and the wishes of your family and friends and return to the stage when your health as well as your age make it impossible?"

Mrs. Burton shook her head.

"Really, Aunt Patricia, that is an unkind fashion of presenting the situation and I hope the girls will not agree with you. I have no idea of giving up my position as guardian so long as the Sunrise Camp Fire girls do not desire some one else. In a few weeks they will be leaving Tahawus cabin and returning home and we have no right to be selfish enough to ask them to remain longer. As for me, I am entirely well again, thanks to you. I saw a special-

ist in New York and he agrees with the doctor here that I need have no further anxiety about myself. And I have had a splendid offer which has made me very happy. Really, Aunt Patricia, I am not yet too old, but as I am becoming so, all the more reason why I should return to the stage immediately. I have not wished to worry you, but the day before I left for New York I received a very discouraging letter from my husband telling me that some stock in which we had invested more heavily than we should had ceased to be of value. So you must understand the necessity for me to return to work as well as the pleasure. I know, dear, that you would help us of course, but it is not necessary and already we have accepted too much from you. I wrote Richard mentioning what I wished to do, told him not to worry over the tiresome stock, and he telegraphed his consent when I was in New York. You'll come and live with us; I'm sure you will enjoy the winter. I have been idling too long."

There was a silence in the room waiting for Miss Patricia to reply. Finally she arose. "As you have arrived at your decision

without consulting me and knowing it to be against my wish and judgment, Polly, there is nothing for me to say. Only bear in mind that our friendship is ended and I shall never forgive you."

Miss Patricia stalked out of the room.

Bettina Graham put her arm about Mrs. Burton, who was slighter and small, and drew her back inside the circle.

"Don't try to argue the question with Aunt Patricia any more to-night, dear, you are far too tired."

"Perhaps next winter when you are in New York some of us may also spend the winter there; it is what I am hoping and planning for a part of the year, as I wish to take a special course at Columbia. I am trying to induce father and mother to give their consent," Alice Ashton remarked.

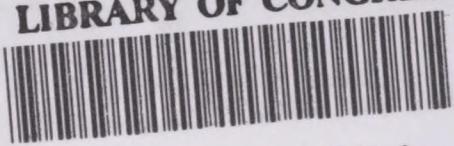
"No such good fortune for me!" Bettina ejaculated.

"But perhaps it is as well that Tante be separated from a few of us, if she is to have time and strength for her own career." Bettina made a graceful gesture.

"Here is wishing you greater fame and fortune than ever before."

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